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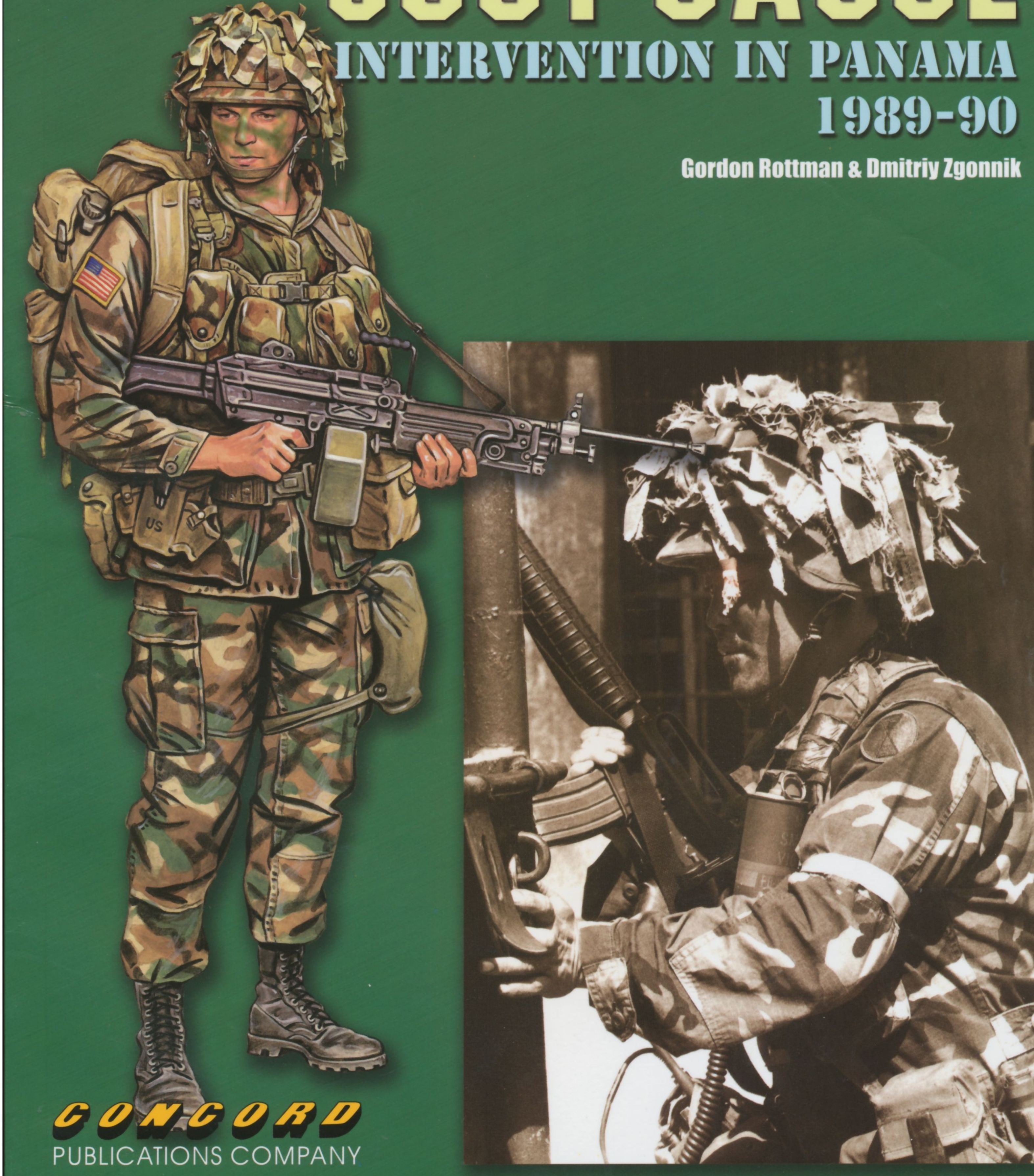
JUST CAUSE

INTERVENTION IN PANAMA 1989-90

Gordon Rottman & Dmitriy Zgonnik



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Text by Gordon L. Rottman
Color Plates by Dmitriy Zgonnik

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10/F, B1, Kong Nam Industrial Building
603-609 Castle Peak Road
Tsuen Wan, New Territories
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ISBN 962-361-633-3
printed in Hong Kong

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Introduction

The turmoil leading to the American intervention in Panama to oust the de facto ruler, General Manuel Antonio Noriega, began in early 1987. Reports of repeated human rights violations within Panama and increasing drug trafficking began eroding the support Noriega once enjoyed inside his country.

The United States had supported Noriega before he started abusing his power. He relied on the US for military and economic aid, which had begun to lift Panama to a leading power in Central America. The controversial Carter-Torrijos Treaty of 1978 took affect on 1 October 1979 and at that time the former Panama Canal Zone, up to then under complete US control, was dissolved. The US though still operated the Panama Canal through the Panama Canal Commission and maintained extensive military facilities throughout what had been the Zone. US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), a joint service command responsible for US armed forces operations and assistance throughout Latin America, was headquartered in Panama City as was US Army, South (USARSO). The US was still responsible for the defense of the Canal and had full right of access throughout what had been the former Canal Zone. The Canal would be turned over to Panamanian control on 31 December 2000 and all US armed forces would be withdrawn by then. Panama would then be responsible for the Canal's operation and security. New Year's Day 2000 would see Panamanian territory and the Canal under its complete control for the first time since 1903.

Following the signing of the treaty a new sense of national direction was felt by many and there was a renewed welling of Panamanian nationalism. It was accompanied by a great deal of turmoil with the country having five governments between 1982 and 1985. The Panamanian Defense Forces played a major role in the government and was the real arbitrator of power in the country. Noriega, the former G-2 (intelligence) officer of the PDF, manipulated his way into power in 1985. It was not long before it became apparent that Noriega's les Botas (the Boots)—his police and security forces—were brutally suppressing opposition, and were involved in drug trafficking. Before long Noriega began seeking support from communist Nicaragua and Cuba. That support began to appear in the form of limited military assistance and large numbers of weapons and munitions. It was soon found that Noriega's regime was little more than a mafia and was heavily involved with trafficking drugs from Columbia to America.

Noriega's popular support began to falter in the country with widespread human rights violations, repression of political opponents, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling to other countries. Reports of past election fraud, widespread corruption, and the kidnappings and deaths of opposition leaders raised questions about the Noriega's intentions. His stockpiling of arms, expansion of the PDF, and announced future plans for even greater expansion and arms acquisitions raised more questions. Feeling pressure from the US Government, at the end of 1987 Noriega threatened to suspend the visas of USSOUTHCOM and US officials in the country.

In September 1987 the US Senate passed a resolution calling for the re-establishment of a democratic civilian government in Panama. In February 1988 US Federal grand juries indicted Noriega on drug trafficking and racketeering. One thing was clear; Noriega could not be allowed to gain total control of the Panama Canal in 2000. It was used by international shipping, an important commercial artery for most nations trading by sea, it was obvious that he would abuse it as a tool to extort money and political advantage.

The figurehead President of Panama, Eric Delvalle, attempted to fire Noriega. Instead, Noriega dismissed the president and vice president and installed his own puppet, Manuel Palma. The US refused to recognize Palma. Panamanian funds in US banks were frozen and economic sanctions were imposed. Harassment and attacks on Americans increased. The US military increased its "freedom of passage" patrols and training exercises, which were rehearsals for the coming intervention.

In April 1988 the US Department of Defense began deploying additional units to Panama and plans were developed to conduct an intervention. These forces augmented the existing defense force, the 197th Infantry Brigade (Light) (Separate).

In July the US began increasing pressure on Noriega by suspending all military and economic aid, virtually crippling the Panamanian economy, in hopes that Noriega would step down. US businesses were urged to withdraw from Panama following trade sanctions imposed by President Ronald Regan.

Tensions mounted inside Panama as opposition political parties began gearing up for the upcoming May elections. Opposition candidates were hoping for a peaceful assertion by the will of the people to take the big stick from Noriega's hands. Demonstrations against Noriega's proposed candidates intensified. Noriega's government though controlled radio and television and he used this to his advantage broadcasting his propaganda and political ads for his candidates. At the same time opposition stations were seized and shutdown as were free press newspapers. Repression was extreme. Noriega formed the paramilitary Dignity Battalions as a means of agitating his supporters and to provide an additional means of harassing Americans and Panamanian opponents. They were motivated by his announcements of the pending Yankee invasion. The Dig Bats were heavily armed, but poorly trained and lacked any real military discipline. They did consist of his staunch supporters and were committed to clashes against opposition demonstrations and marches, and efforts to harass and block US freedom of movement patrols and other US military traffic. They usually donned civilian clothes to make it appear these actions were conducted by spontaneous popular support.

The 8 May 1989 elections saw a three-to-one victory over Noriega's candidates, but he illegally nullified the elections. Protest demonstrations turned violent and bloody with the opposition presidential candidate publicly beaten in the street by Noriega's thugs. More US troops were deployed. President George Bush, Senior deployed a brigade to Panama. This was Operation NIMROD DANCER with almost 2,000 troops deployed.

President Bush announced that he "would not be intimidated by the bullying tactics, brutal through they may be, of the dictator Noriega." He made it clear that the troop deployment was a defensive measure to "protect the integrity of the Panama Canal treaties." The troops had orders to defend American lives and property.

Following the deployment the harassing incidents aimed at Americans dwindled temporarily. The US troops began commencing a series of training exercises, masked by 'freedom of movement" patrols around and between US installations. These were actually rehearsals for Operation JUST CAUSE.

Civil service workers and dependents (troops' families) of US military personnel began moving onto US installations as a security precaution. The revolt against Noriega went underground for the most part. Rather than large demonstrations and marches, the opposition met in small church gatherings.

An uneasy calm engulfed Panama in the following months with Noriega regime propaganda portraying the US as occupiers in the wake of the "legitimate" May elections. Banners declaring "Yankee go home!" and "MAN = Paz" (Manuel Antonio Noriega equals peace) lined city streets along with nationalist slogans painted on walls and banners.

Verbal threats and beatings were inflicted on Panamanians by Dig Bat members for associating with Americans. Panamanian women seen fraternizing with Americans were threatened with having their heads shaved. Threat letters were sent to American military personnel and bomb threats telephoned to US installations to include Canal Commission facilities. Dig Bats often conducted demonstrations at the entrances to US military bases and even on the bases as some were in dual use by the US and PDF.

Dissatisfied PDF junior officers, led by a general, mounted a coup attempt in October 1989. With only 300 supporters and quickly outmaneuver by units loyal to Noriega, it failed. The US had predicted the coup, but did not intervene.

During the second week of November Noriega convinced the Panamanian legislative body to name him the "Maximum Leader." After assuming the title he declared that a "state of war" existed between the United States and Panama. Most military dependents were evacuated back to the States.

On the night of the 16 December a group of US military officers were involved in a shooting incident at a PDF roadblock leaving a Marine officer dead. The PDF also kidnapped a US Navy officer and his wife who had witnessed the murder. Both were physically abused and the wife threatened with sexual assault.

The next day President Bush made the critical decision to intervene and commit troops to arrest Noriega and turn the Panamanian government over to responsible individuals. As soon as the order was received existing plans were revised and adjustments made in an effort to apprehend Noriega as quickly as possible to prevent him from gaining control of his dispersed units and them rallying to his side. Special Forces elements had Noriega and other key individuals under surveillance. The locations of units and all PDF facilities were kept tabs on and a great deal of intelligence collected on the PDF and its capabilities.

US military planners quickly developed a plan involving a joint (multi-service) combined arms operation that would take advantage of superior American firepower, numbers, and their ability to maneuver rapidly to destroy or neutralize Noriega's military strength. The goal was to apprehend Noriega and other key leaders, keep US and Panamanian civilian and military casualties to a minimum, limit collateral damage, prevent damage to Canal facilities, install a new government, and to do so as quickly as possible.

US forces in Panama numbered 13,000 including administrative and support personnel, and another 9,000 were planned to be flown in from the 7th Infantry Division (Light) and 82d Airborne Division, and Special Operations Forces along with support units. The PDF numbered some 15,000 personnel, including air force, navy, police, and security forces. About 6,000 were combat troops. Estimates of Dig Bat strength varied from 2,000 to 3,000. Many opted to avoid action once the Americans were turned loose.

In the middle of the night on 20 December 1989 a series of well organized and coordinated attacks were launched. Units already in-place in Panama and those delivered by air from the States commenced operations in the darkness of night. American armed forces employed everything from tanks to the stealth fighter-bombers to overwhelm the surprised PDF. Three Ranger and three airborne battalions were parachuted in and extremely effective use was made of helicopters to airmobile assault units to their objectives. Many PDF put up a stiff resistance, even when abandoned by their political-appointee officers. The main strength of the PDF was destroyed or dispersed by the end of the first day of Operation JUST CAUSE. Special Operations units from the Army, Air Force, and Navy played a valuable role.

The Panama Canal was closed for 24 hours during the fighting, the first time it had closed since passing its first ship from one ocean to another in 1914. Sporadic and ineffectual resistance from scattered PDF remnants continued until 23 December. What was left surrendered that day in Colon on the Atlantic-side. A new Panamanian government had already been installed.

Noriega was able to elude the American dragnet seeking him. He was finally found at the Vatican's Papal Nunciatura (equivalent to an embassy). After a march by 20,000 Panamanians he surrendered to the American commander on 3 January 1990. After ensuring there was no danger of renegades causing further problems

Operation JUST CAUSE was terminated on 31 January. The national rebuilding began with US assistance and the Panama Canal was formally turned over to the government on 31 December 1991. Noreiga was sentenced to 40 years in a US Federal prison. His sentence has since been reduced to 30 years, but Panama has requested his extradition to serve 20-40 years for murder charges he was tried for in absentia.

US casualties were 23 killed in action (18 Army, four Navy, one Marine), 330 wounded, and two female dependents killed by PDF fire. The body of another American citizen was later found in a mass grave of PDF victims killed before JUST CAUSE. The US lists 814 PDF dead and several hundred wounded. Many wounded PDF wearing civilian clothes were treated in hospitals and no effort was made to sort them out. Some 5,054 PDF were detained. Another 220 Panamanian civilians were killed as they were caught in crossfire, hit by stray fire, mistaken identity, or foolishly attempting to run roadblocks. Scores were wounded to the same causes. Accusations were leveled accusing the US of attempting to cover up higher numbers of civilian dead by burying them in mass graves, but it was proved that the graves contained the remains of opponents murdered by the PDF prior to JUST CAUSE.

This photobook is not intended as a decisive history of Operation JUST CAUSE, but attempts to portray in available photographs what the operation was like and an idea of the weapons and equipment used.

The Weapons of Operation JUST CAUSE

The weapons listed here are those employed by ground forces.

The US armed forces were still employing some weapons it had used since before the Vietnam War 20 years previously. However, new series of weapons had begun to be fielded in the 1980s and this was the first combat service seen by many. Most were used by the Army and/or Marines, but some listed here were unique to Air Force Special Operations and Navy SEALs. These same weapons were used in the 1990-91 Gulf War.

9mm M9 pistol (Beretta)
.45-cal. M1911A1 pistol (Colt)
5.56mm M16A1 and M16A12 rifles (Colt)
5.56mm M16A1 and GAU-5 submachine guns (Colt)
9mm M16 submachine gun (Colt)
9mm MP4A3S submachine gun (H&K)
12-ga. Model 590 riot shotgun (Mossberg)
7.62mm M21 sniper rifle (modified M14)
7.62mm M24 sniper rifle (Remington)
5.56mm M249 squad automatic weapons (SAW) (FN)
7.62mm M60 and M60E3 machine guns
7.62mm M240 machine gun (FN)
.50-cal. M2 machine gun (Browning)
40mm M203 grenade launcher
66mm M72A3 light antiarmor weapons (LAW)
84mm M136 light antiarmor weapon (AT-4)
83mm MK 153 MOD 0 shoulder-launched multi-purpose assault weapon (SMAW)
90mm M67 recoilless rifle
60mm M224 mortar
81mm M29A1 mortar
81mm M252 mortar
107mm (4.2-in.) M30 mortar
105mm M102 howitzer
20mm M167A1 Vulcan air defense gun

The PDF employed a wide range of weapons from the US, Western Europe, Warsaw Pact, and other countries; nationality of origin is identified. They varied from obsolete to modern. The PDF lacked artillery, wire-guided antiarmor missiles, air defense weapons, target acquisition radar, air defense radar, and electronic intercept, jammers, or electronic counter-measures systems.

9mm pistols of various makes	US, European
.38-cal. M-10-2 revolver (S&W)	US
.45-cal. M1911A1 pistol (Colt)	US
5.56mm M16A1 rifle (Colt)	US
5.56mm Type 65 rifle	Taiwan
7.62mm AK-47 and AKM assault rifles	USSR
7.62mm MPiKMS-72 assault rifle	East Germany
7.62mm FAL rifle (FN)	Belgium
9mm Uzi submachine gun	Israel
.45-cal. M1928A1 submachine gun (Thompson)	US
.30-cal. M1 rifle (Garand)	US
.30-cal. M1 and M2 carbines	US
12-ga. Model 870 riot shotgun (Remington)	US
7.62mm M21 sniper rifle	US
7.62mm SVD sniper rifle	USSR
7.62mm M60 machine gun	US
7.62mm MAG machine gun (FN)	Belgium
.30-cal. M1919A4 machine gun (Browning)	US
7.92mm ZB-53 machine gun	Czechoslovakia
.50-cal. M2 machine gun (Browning)	US
14.5 mm ZPU-4 quad machine gun	USSR
38mm tear gas gun (Federal Laboratories)	US
40mm M79 grenade launcher	US
40mm M203 grenade launcher	US
40mm H&K grenade launcher	West Germany
40mm RPG-2 and RPG-7 antitank projectors	USSR*
64mm RPG-18 rocket launcher	USSR
75mm Type 56 recoilless rifle	China
89mm LARC-89 rocket launcher	France
3.5-in. M20A1B1 rocket launcher	US
90mm M67 recoilless rifle	US
60mm C-03 mortar (Soltam)	Israel
60mm M2 mortar	US
81mm M29A1 mortar	US
10mm (4.2-in.) mortar	US
120mm RT-61 mortar	France

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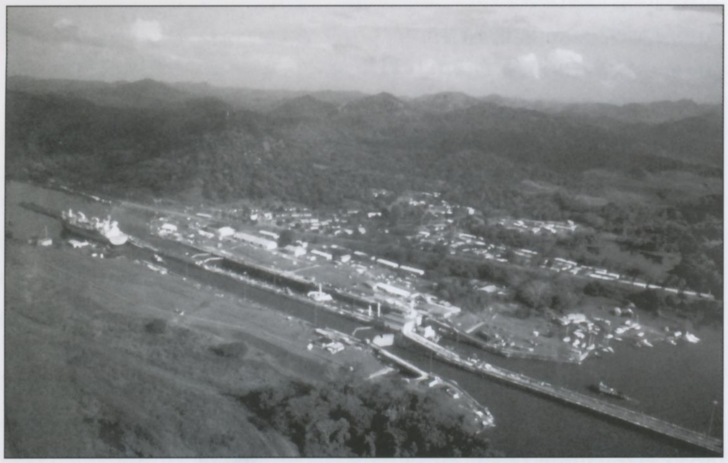
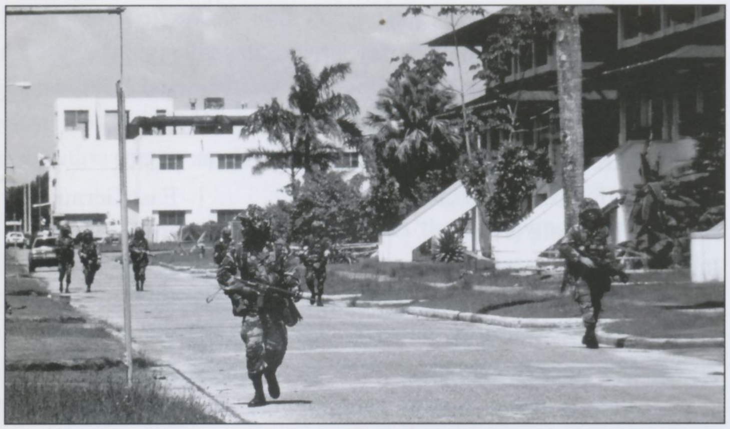
* Also Chinese copies, the Type 56 and Type 67, respectively.

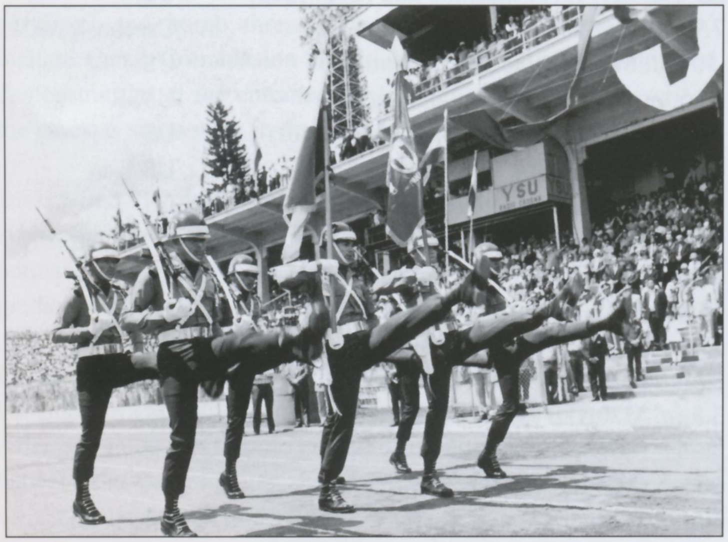
A Storm Threatens



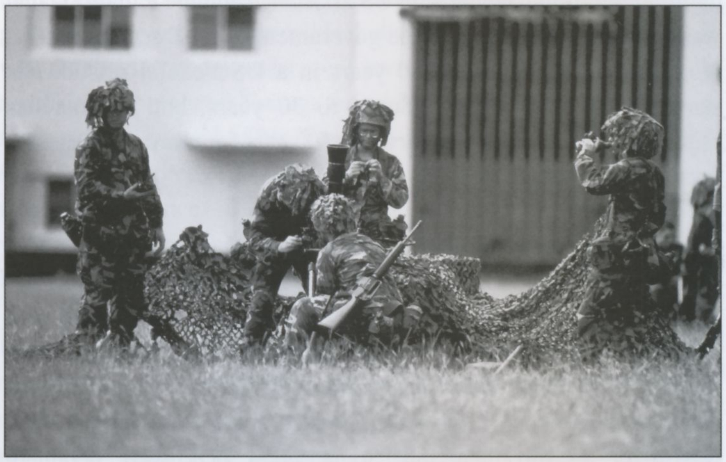
The United States was obligated to ensure the safe operation and passage of international ships through the Panama Canal from ocean-to-ocean. Here are the one-stage Pedro Miguel Locks, the second set of locks inland on the Pacific side.



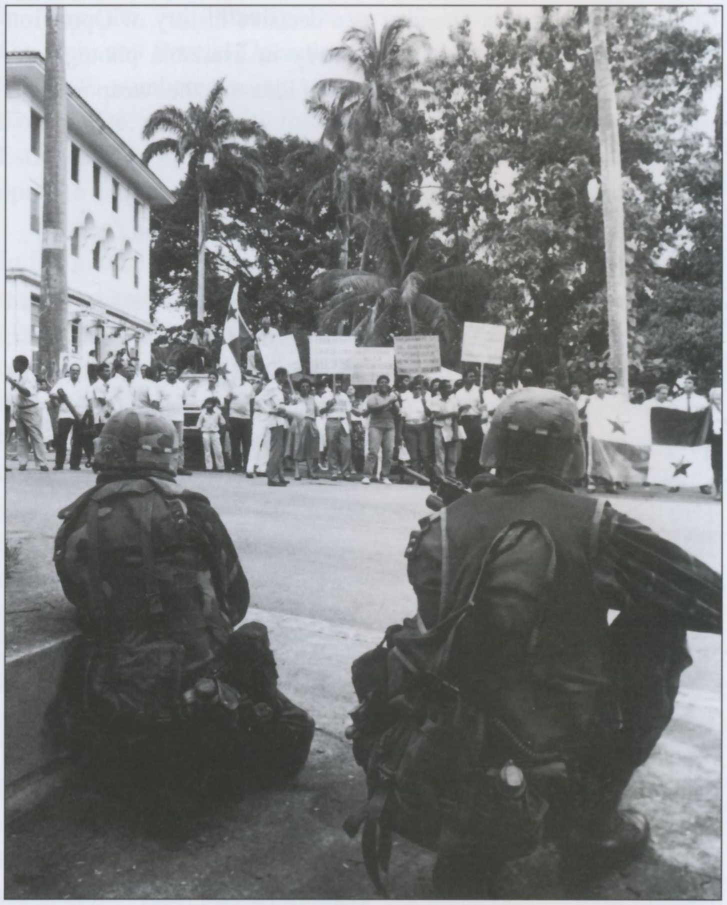
A 2d Battalion (Light), 27th Infantry Regiment rifle squad patrols through a town near the PDF barracks. Even through patrolling a short distance on a brief duration mission the infantrymen carry full combat equipment including rucksacks. Panama experiences a May to early December rainy season, which had just ended when JUST CAUSE was launched. Being in Central America Panama has only two seasons, wet and dry.



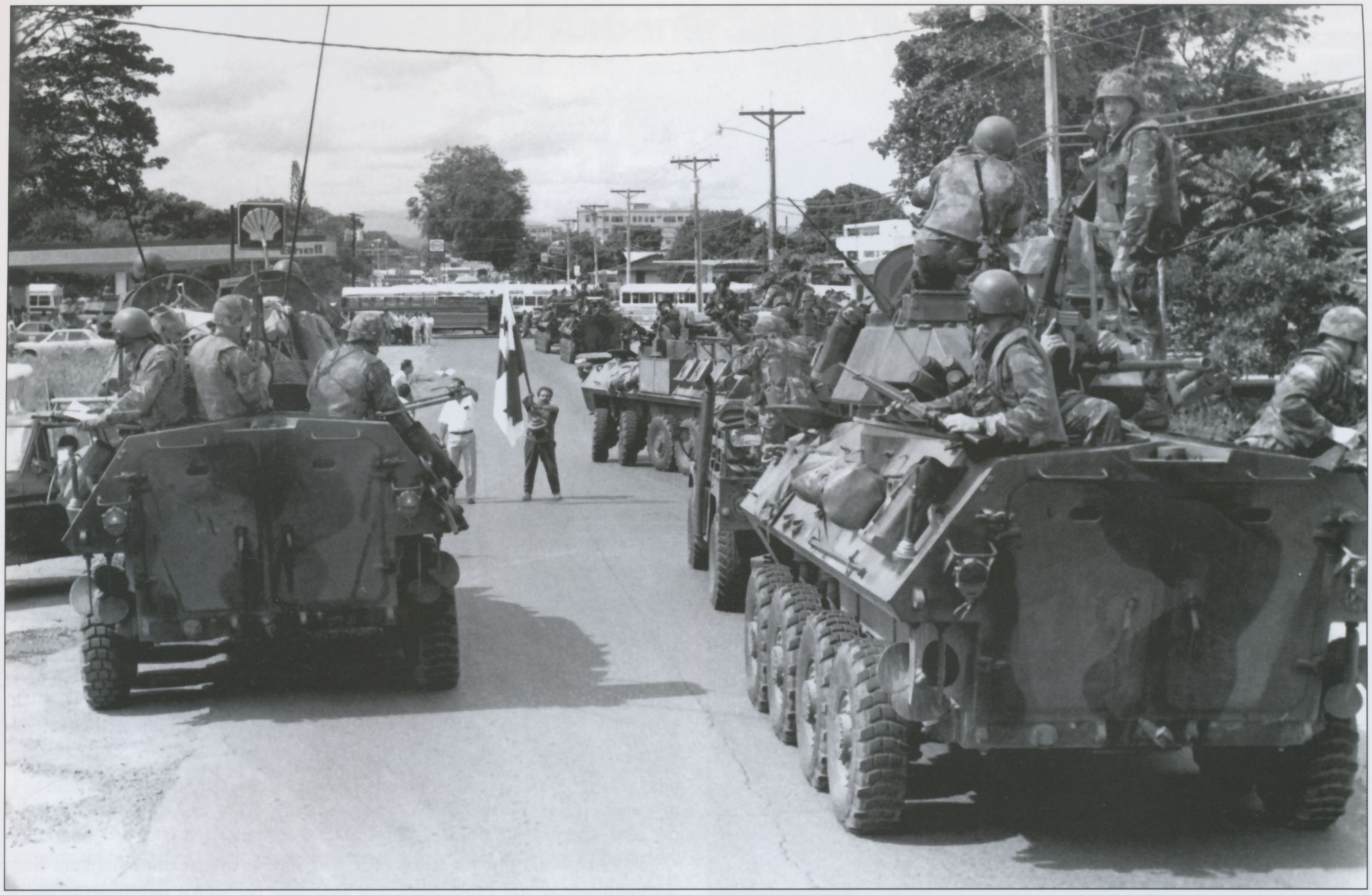
A PDF color guard parades in one of many ceremonial events so favored by General Noriega. Such displays were purely for show to impress the people and the international media. They offered little substance. The goose-stepping color guard is armed with 5.56mm Type 65 rifles (generally called the T-65), a Taiwan-made weapon merging a combination of AR-15 and AR-18 designs. The uniforms are olive green, except those of the color bearers who wear brown. Helmets are olive green with white bands and the ceremonial web gear and rifle slings are white.



A mortar squad attached to 2d Platoon, Company B, 2d Battalion (Light), 27th Infantry Regiment set up their 81mm M252 mortar. A vinyl woodlands camouflage net is draped over their equipment and ammunition boxes. The battalion was with 1st Brigade, 7th Infantry Division (Light). This was part of the small unit SAND FLEA and battalion-size PURPLE STORM freedom of movement exercises. The exercises not only improved unit proficiency, but demonstrated the capabilities of American units to the PDF. In the background is a PDF barracks. Such exercises were non-threatening to the PDF, that is, weapons were not aimed in the direction of PDF installations and small unit maneuvering did not appear to advance toward their installations.

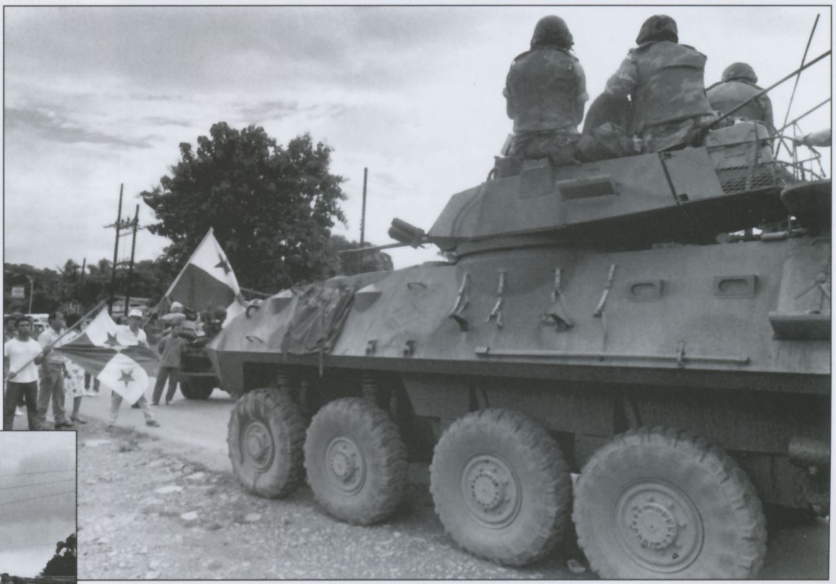


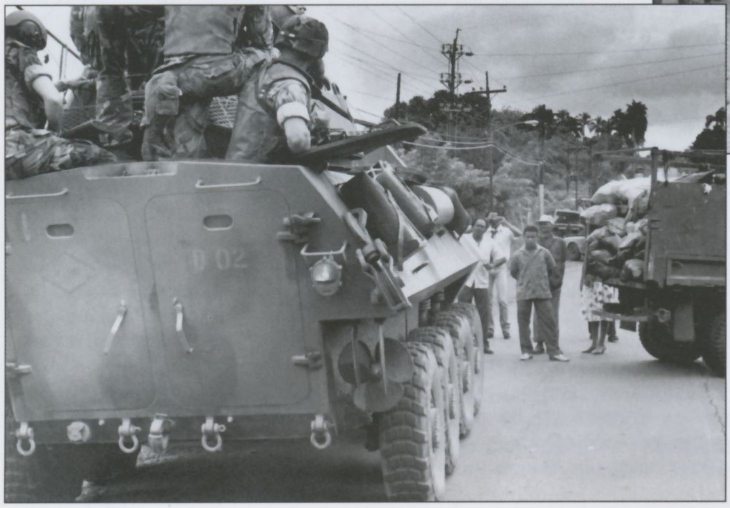
Army military police (MP) secure the ground of the Gorgas Army Community and Hospital, a residential area for soldiers' families. Protesters display posters and Panamanian flags in opposition to the American decision to conduct inspections of all vehicles entering the complex after receiving numerous bomb threats. Such protests were not conducted because of spontaneous public concerns, but orchestrated by General Noriega's agitators with civilian-clothed Dignity Battalion members scattered through the crowd. The MPs wear full combat gear. The MP to the right is armed with a 5.56mm M16A1 rifle mounting a 40mm M203 grenade launcher. He wears a grenade carrier vest for 18 high-explosive and four pyrotechnic rounds.



Marine Corps light armored vehicles mounting a 25mm chain gun (LAV-25) gingerly work their way around protesters. Every effort was made to prevent injuring protestors, even though some foolishly placed themselves in front of moving vehicles without warning. These LAVs are from Company D, 2d Light Armored Vehicle Battalion.

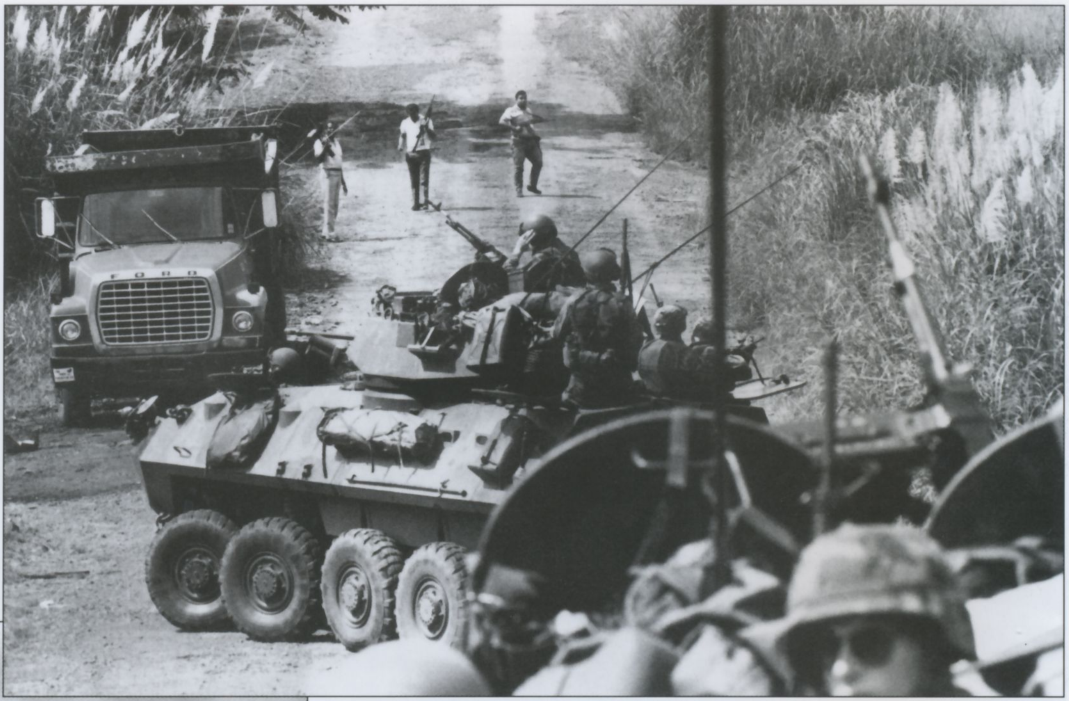
The Panamanian flag seen displayed in so many demonstrations and incorporated into PDF insignia, from the viewer's perspective, has white quarters in the upper left with a blue star and lower right with a red star while the upper right quarter is red and the lower left blue. Adopted in 1903, blue represented the Conservative Party and red the Liberal Party of the day. White stood for peace and purity; the blue star for honesty of the country's life and the red star represented

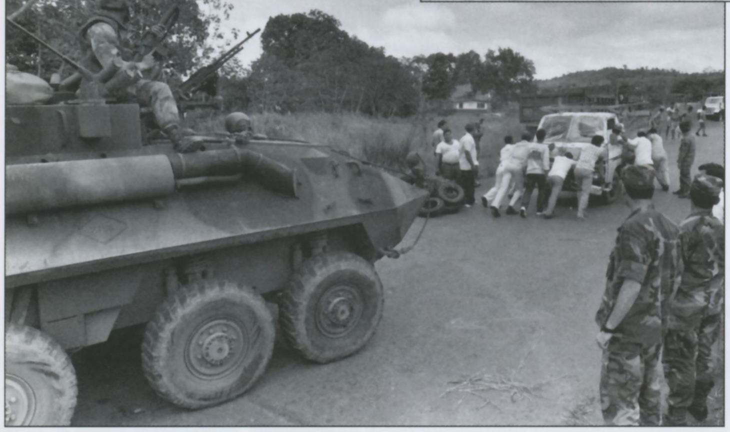




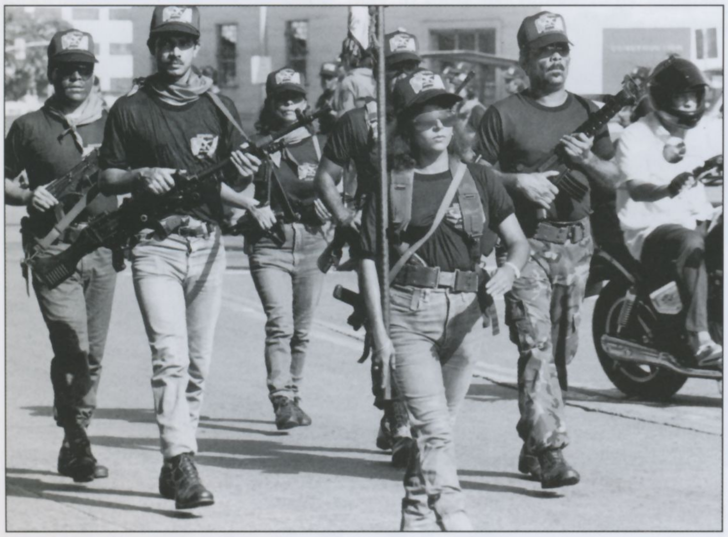
Panamanian vehicles were parked partly blocking roads with the doors locked and keys removed. The Americans would not remove them in a manner that might cause damage. Here a LAV-25 crew faces down protesters. The crew wears woodlands pattern PASGT body armor vests. Luminous "cat's eye" tabs were habitually worn on the back of helmet camouflage bands for night identification. Five-gallon water and fuel cans are fastened to the sides.

Protesters were usually unarmed, and while vocal, they were non-violent. Here though a right of access patrol halts when confronted by an illegal armed roadblock. Note that vehicle-mounted and individual weapons are not aimed at the armed protesters showing a great deal of constraint on the marines' part. These patrols covered a wide area and served to familiarize the in-country troops very well with the road system, urban areas, countryside, and location of PDF facilities.

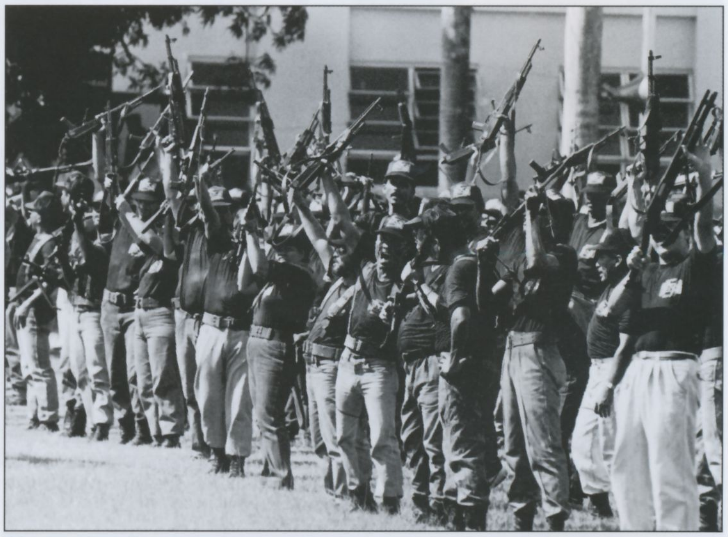




Friendly civilians push a truck off the road. Far more Panamanians were sympathetic to the Americans and opposed Noriega's oppressive regime than supported it. Like all dictatorships he attempted to keep his citizens in line by the use of threats and intimidation from La Botas (The Boots), the nickname for his police and paramilitary security forces. Piles of old automobile tires, seen over the LAV's nose, were often burned to block traffic. It can be seen that this particular situation is not too tense as two US soldiers look on who are unarmed and wear no protective helmets or body



Members of a Dignity Battalion march though Panama City during one of many parades, which were accompanied by propaganda and motivational speeches. The Dig Bats, which US servicemen called "Dingbats," were composed of volunteers, largely unemployed thugs and they attracted a criminal element. The t-shirts and caps are dark blue and the insignia red, blue, and white inscribed with Batallon Dignidad in white. While possessing little real military training or discipline, they were well armed. Weapons seen here include a Belgium 7.62mm FN MAG machine gun, East German 7.62mm MPiKMS-72 assault rifles with folding stocks, and Taiwanese 5.56mm T-65 rifles. The guidon bearer and machine gunner carry revolvers tucked in their trousers.

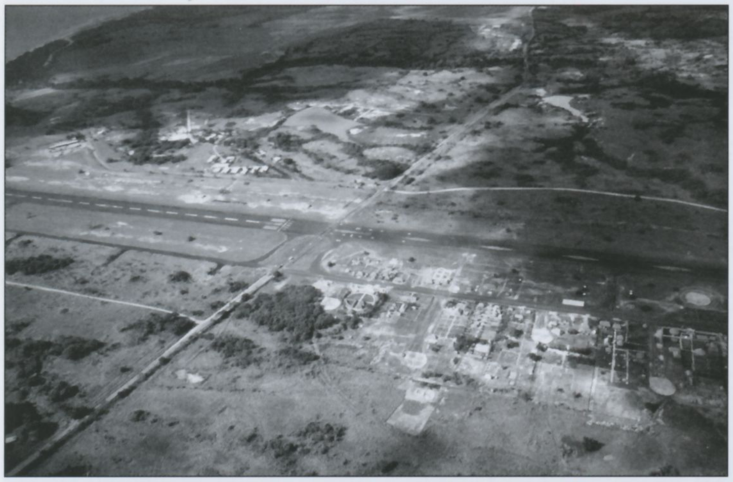


Dignity Battalion members demonstrate their enthusiasm during an anti-American rally on Ft Amador. This was a joint US-Panamanian base so the Dig Bats could not be kept off. The "right of access" agreement worked both ways. Most are armed with East German 7.62mm MPiKMS-72 assault rifles. A Remington 12-ga. Model 870 riot shotgun with a folding stock can be seen to the right. Other Dig Bats wore mid-blue or red t-shirts, both sometimes with black neck and sleeve cuff bands. Blue jeans, olive green or camouflage military trousers, or civilian slacks of varied colors were worn with combat boots or running shoes. Demonstrations were becoming increasingly threatening and US servicemen were murdered and civilians kidnapped and harassed.

The 75th Rangers and 82d Airborne Jump In

Three parachute assaults were conducted into Panama, 0003 hours at Rio Hato Military Base and 0110 hours, 20 December 1989 on to Tocumén/Torrijos Airports by the Rangers. The second jump was followed at 0210 hours by 1st Brigade, 82d Airborne Division jumping on to the Tocumén/Torrijos Airports. Being night jumps no known photographs exist. A selection of daytime training jumps is provided here to give an idea of how the airborne assault appeared.

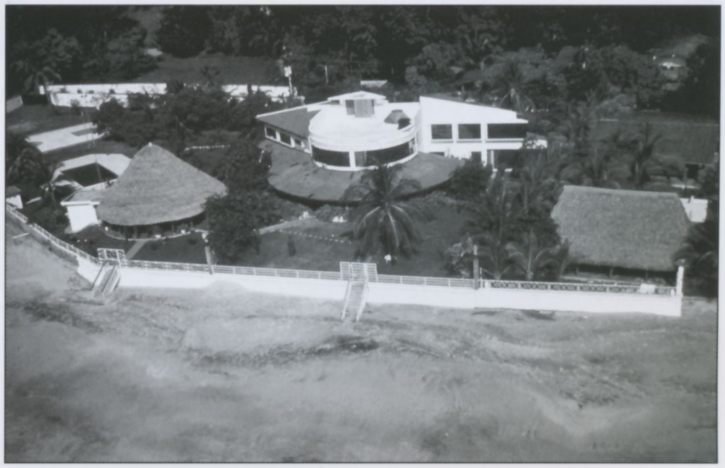
For both the Tocumén/Torrijos Airports jumps the Rangers and 82d Airborne were delivered by C-141B jet transports flying from different bases in Georgia. The primary drop zone (DZ) was on Torrijos Airport—the two airports were situated almost end-to-end and Tocumén was mainly a military airbase. The assault jumps were conducted from 500 feet. Here C-141B transports drop 82d Airborne Division paratroopers during an exercise at Ft Bragg, NC. Four Sheridans were dropped on to the Tocumén/Torrijos Airports and another four had been secretly airlifted in prior to the invasion.



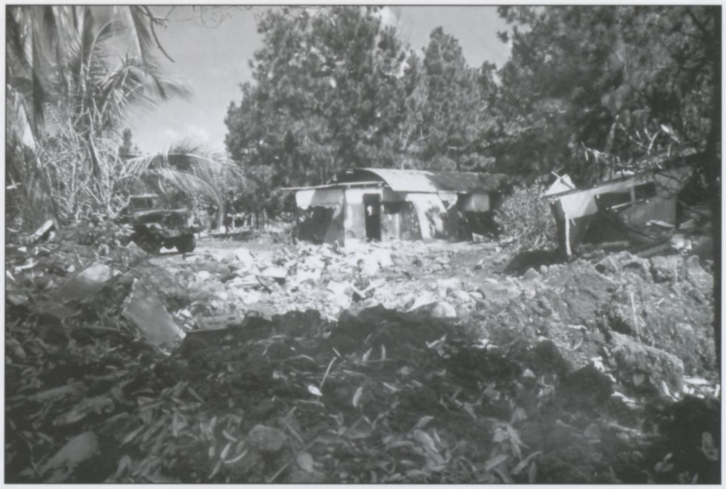
An aerial view of Rio Hato Military Base and its airfield 55 miles west of Panama City sits on the Pacific coast, which can be seen in the upper left. It was defended by 720 well armed troops, although many had been given Christmas leave having not been alerted or ordered otherwise. Seizing this base would neutralize a major PDF force that could respond to American actions in Panama City. With the base in American hands they possessed a base of operations to secure western Panama once the main PDF elements in Panama City were neutralized. The Rangers jumping at Rio Hato were aboard 20 Lockheed C-130H Hercules four-turbo-prop transports.

General Noriega's beach house was at Farallon two kilometers west of Rio Hato. It was secured by 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment soon after the base was seized. The main reason the undefended house was seized was to locate information of intelligence value and a trove of valuable documents was discovered.

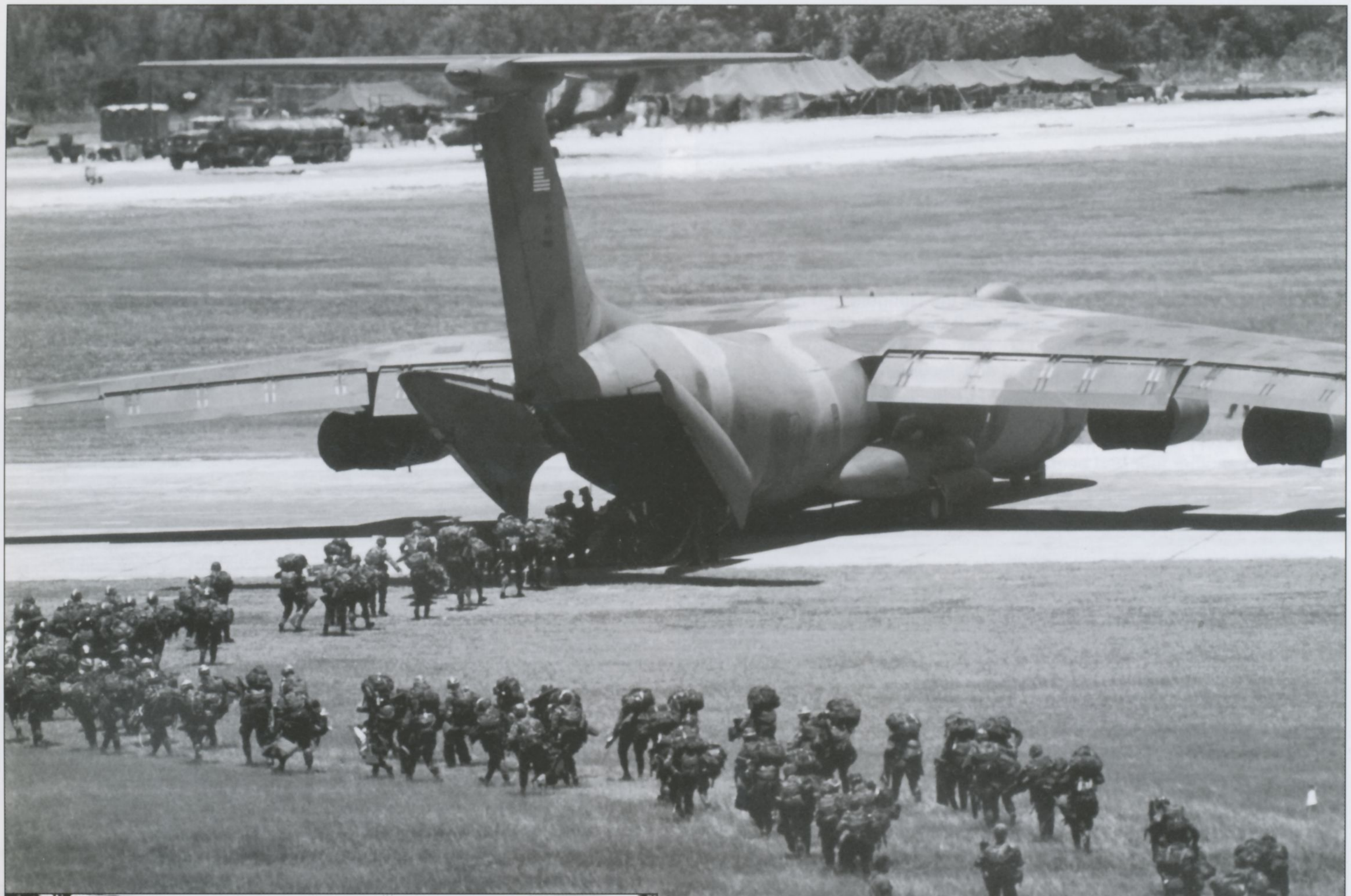
Some have questioned the need to drop in three battalions of the 82d after the Rangers had dropped in. The reason was because the three battalions were dropped in less than three hours—it would have been much faster if an ice storm in North Carolina had not delayed the departure of some flights—and did not have to land. If dozens of C-141s had landed on the airports it would have required many more hours for landing time, taxiing, parking, off-loading, and then taking off again. This would have caused air traffic control problems at night on a strange airfield and there was limited space available to taxi and park arriving and departing aircraft. In all 144 C-141s and C-130s dropped the Rangers, paratroopers, and their equipment.

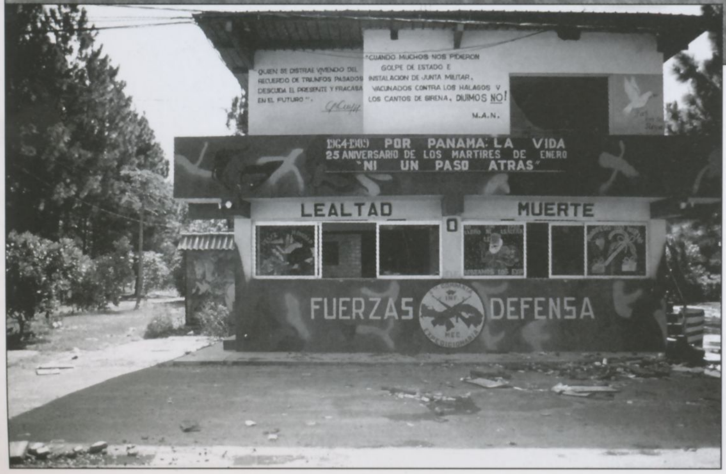


Two then still classified Lockheed F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter-bombers preceded the Rangers' jump with each dropping a single 2,000-pound laser-guided bomb in hopes of panicking and confusing the defenders. Instead it served only to alert them to the pending attack. They were able to greet the Rangers with small arms and 14.5mm ZPU-4 machine gun fire. In so far as is known no aircraft or jumpers were hit by ground fire. This is one of the craters caused by the 2,000-pound GBU-27 smart bombs. The bombs contained 550 pounds of tritonal explosive. This was the first combat use of the F-117A.



82d Airborne Division paratroopers, loaded down with rucksacks and equipment bags, load aboard a C-141B transport at Pope Air Force Base, NC adjacent to Ft Bragg, the home of the 82d. The heavy rucksacks and equipment bags were attached to the jumper below his reserve parachute. Within a couple of hundred feet of the ground the jumper would release the rucksack or bag and drop it on a 15-foot lowering line. This prevents the heavy container from injuring the jumper upon landing. An entire airborne rifle company with attachments could be dropped from a single C-141B, but for the Torrijos jump only 68 jumpers were carried because of the length of the DZ.



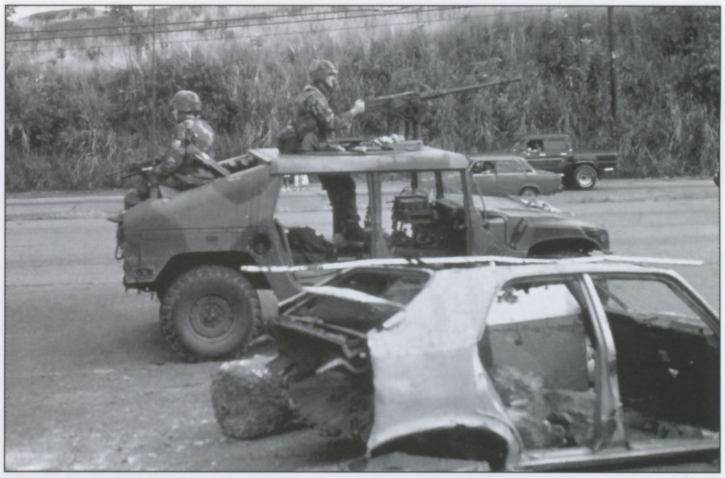

"QUIEN SE DISTRAE VIVIENDO DEL RECUERDO DE TRIUNFOS PASADOS DESCUIDA EL PRESENTE Y FRACASA EN EL FUTURO".
"CUANDO MUCHOS NOS PIDIERON GOLPE DE ESTADO E INSTALACION DE JUNTA MILITAR, VACUNADOS CONTRA LOS HALAGOS Y LOS CANTOS DE SIRENA, DIJIMOS NO!
M.A.N.
1964-1989 POR PANAMA: LA VIDA
25 ANIVERSARIO DE LOS MARTIRES DE ENERO
"NI UN PASO ATRAS"
LEALTAD
O
MUERTE
FUERZAS
DEFENSA

The headquarters building at Rio Hato. The PDF lavishly displayed motivating slogans on military buildings and signs along with buildings being partly camouflage-painted. From bottom to top: 'Defense Forces' depicted with the insignia of the 6th Infantry Mechanized Reconnaissance Company. Above the windows is 'Loyalty or Death.' On the camouflaged balcony wall is 'For Panama: '25th anniversary of the martyrs of January.' To the left is a quote, "Whoever is distracted living in the memories of past triumphs is careless about the present and he will ruin the future." (Name cannot be determined.) To the right is inscribed, "When many of us were asked to initiate a military coup, those of us who were immune to those who would flatter us, we said NO!" MAN = Manual Antonio Noriega.

A civilian points out to a US patrol the direction in which he had seen PDF soldiers fleeing. Some had shed their uniforms and fled in their underwear. Some 80 percent of the population opposed the repressive Noriega regime, even more in the rural areas.

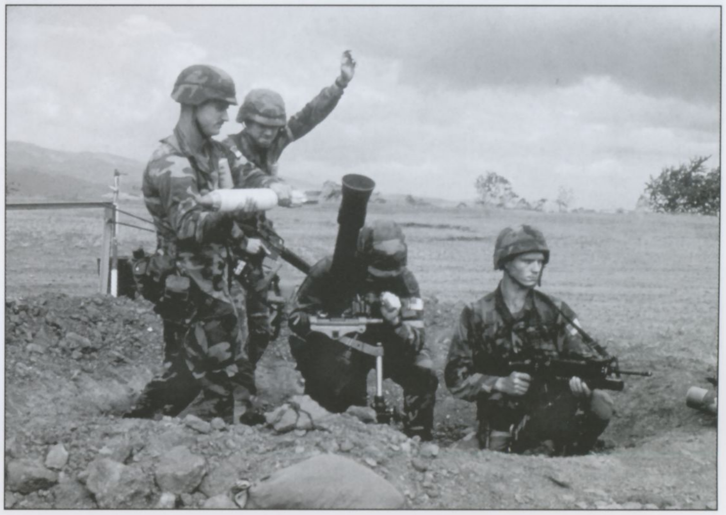
An M16A2 rifle-armed paratrooper adjusts his rear sight as he scans for PDF from among garishly painted buses. Either a subdued, in this case, or a full-color American flag was worn on the upper right sleeve.

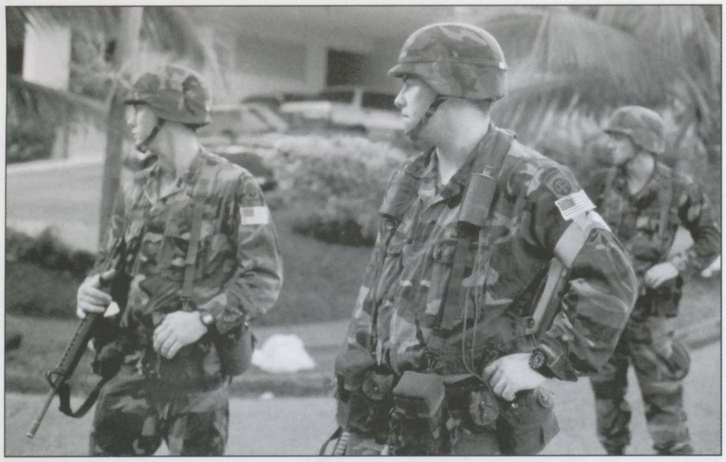
An 81mm M252 mortar crew prepares to fire. This is a posed photograph as the round is an illumination (parachute suspended flare), which would only be fired at night. High-explosive rounds were olive drab with a yellow band and markings, white phosphorus (WP) were pale green with red markings and a yellow band, and illumination were white with black markings. The use of mortars and artillery was extremely restricted during JUST CAUSE owing to the desire to limit collateral damage and civilian causalities. Airborne and light infantry battalions had a mortar platoon in the headquarters company with four tubes. Each of the four mortar squads possessed an M203 grenade launcher for close-in defense.



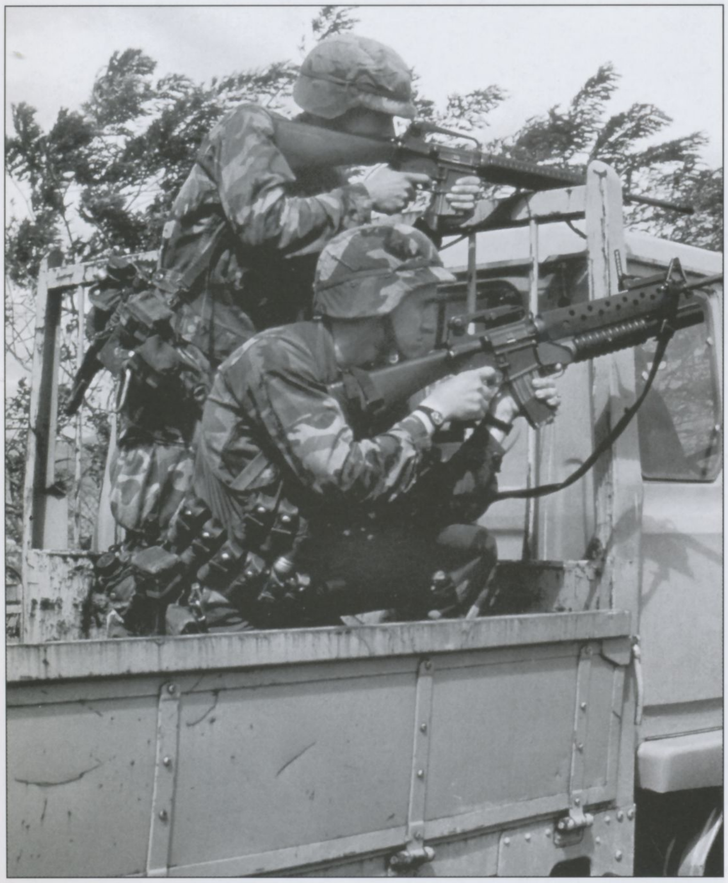
An 82d Airborne Division military police M1025 HMMWV outposts a highway on lookout for Dig Bats and renegade PDF soldiers. The gunner mans a .50-cal. M2 machine gun. The MP in the rear is armed with an M16A2 rifle and M203 grenade launcher. MP Hummers more commonly mounted 7.62mm M60 machine guns. An MP team consisted of three men armed with three M16A2 rifles, three M9 pistols, an M203 grenade launcher, and an M60 machine gun. Six such teams comprised an MP platoon.

An 82d Airborne Division tactical operations center (TOC) has been set-up in a long abandoned building. All units were in contact via radio and field telephones, if in a base camp. Any element venturing out for patrols, checkpoints, outposts, etc. were in radio contact. The MP armband might be worn on the left or right shoulder. The upper extension bore a unit insignia if worn on the left arm and the American flag if worn on the right. Armbands were made of either olive drab cloth with black letters or black nagahide (artificial leather) with white letters.

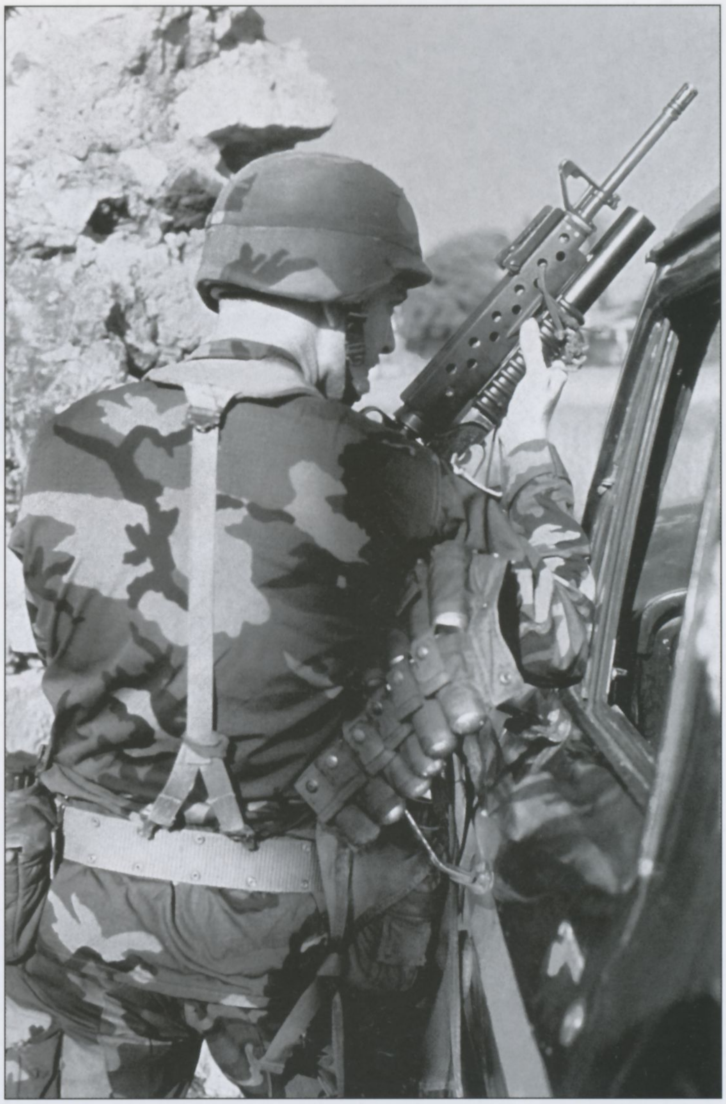




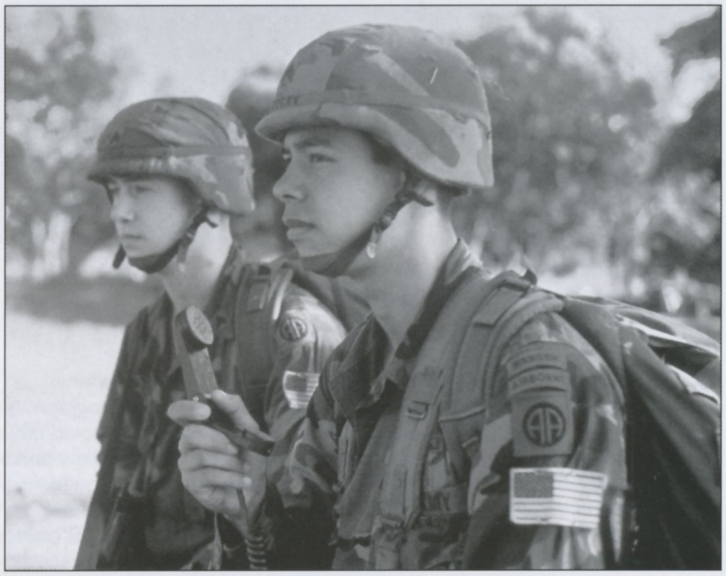
82d Airborne paratroopers on a street patrol. American troops had to conduct patrols to maintain order, prevent looting and arson, control traffic, prevent old scores from being settled between Panamanians, and perform other police duties. Eventually Panamanian Fuerza de Policia (Panamanian Police Force) officers began reporting for duty and after screening were returned to their duties. Even though the Police Force was subordinate to the PDF, large numbers of police did not support Noriega's regime. An M18 colored smoke grenade is attached to the foreground soldier's suspenders. There were available in red, yellow, violet, and green and used to make positions and identify elements to aircraft as well as for signaling. They were olive drab with a light green band and the top the color of the smoke.



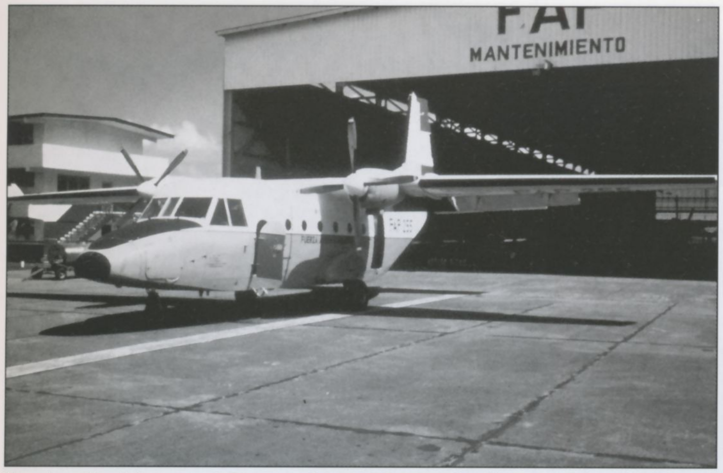
A grenadier and a rifleman use an abandoned truck for a firing position. Note that the rifleman has a 20-round magazine, which had mostly been phased out by the 30-round magazine as the grenadier has. The M203 was an excellent weapon for combat on urbanized terrain. It gave the rifle squad an organic high-explosive direct-fire capability. It was found that when firing through building windows that it was more effective to employ them in pairs. One grenadier would fire a round to shatter the glass and any window coverings (blinds, shutters, drapes) as they would detonate the round upon impact and the blast and fragmentation was expended outside the room. The second grenadier would immediately fire a round to penetrate into the room and detonate against an interior wall. This lesson was learned in the early 1960s, but has never been included in the manual and has to be relearned in each conflict.



An M203 grenade launcher-armed soldier takes cover behind an automobile while receiving sniper fire. For several days after the initial actions Dig Bats and renegade PDF soldiers harassed troops with random and mostly ineffective sniper fire. A grenade carrier vest has been hastily slung over his shoulder. Army rifle squads had two M203s, one per fire team. Marine squads had three fire teams and three grenade launchers. Maximum effective range against point targets, such as a window, was 150 meters and area targets could be engaged at up to 450 meters.



Two paratroopers on patrol. The soldier in the foreground operates an AN/PRC-126 radio used for platoon intercommunication. He wears a Ranger tab over the 82d Airborne Division patch.

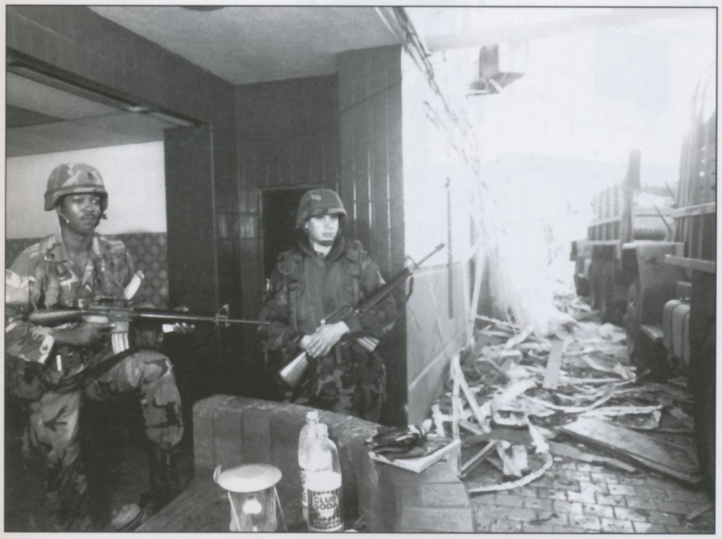


No aircraft of the small Fuerza Aérea Panameña (Panamanian Air Force) made it airborne during JUST CAUSE, all were captured or disabled by gunfire by ground troops. Thirty-seven aircraft were impounded. Here a Spanish-built CASA 212-300 light transport sits at Rio Hato. The tail flash on Panamanian aircraft was (from top to bottom) red, white, and blue with small blue and red stars side-by-side on the white portion. This and other impounded aircraft were turned over to the new government.

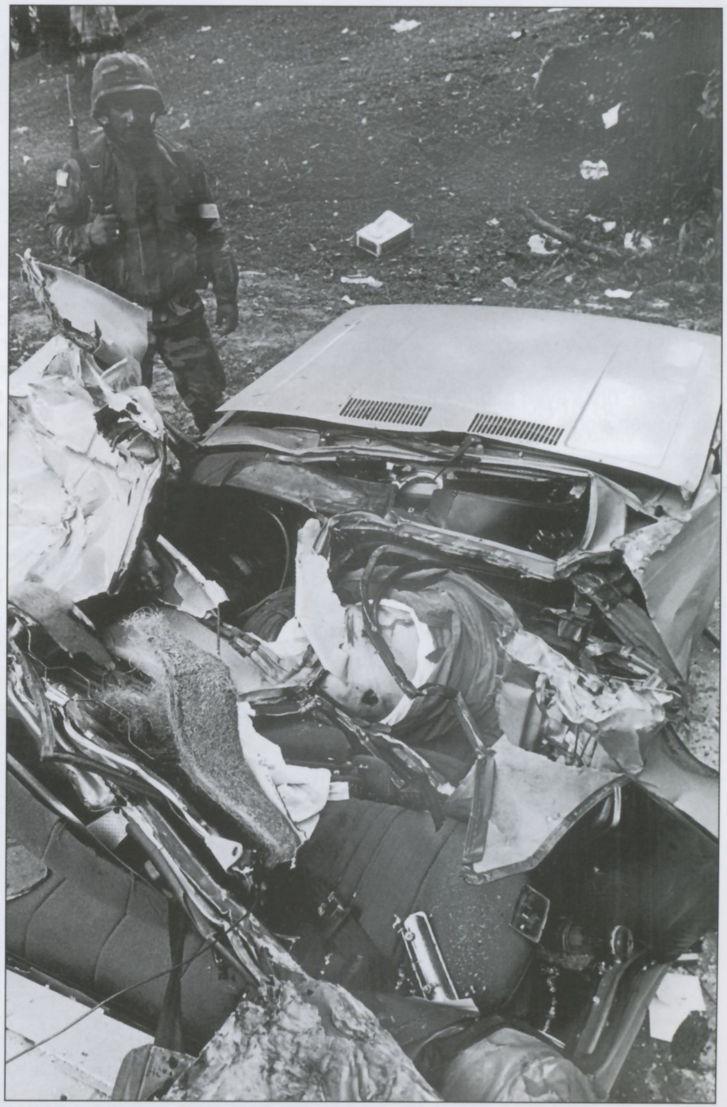
Major General James H. Johnson, Jr. (right) commanding the 82d Airborne Division briefs General Carl E. Vouno, the Army Chief of Staff, when he visited the troops in Panama on the heels of the invasion.

Action in Panama City

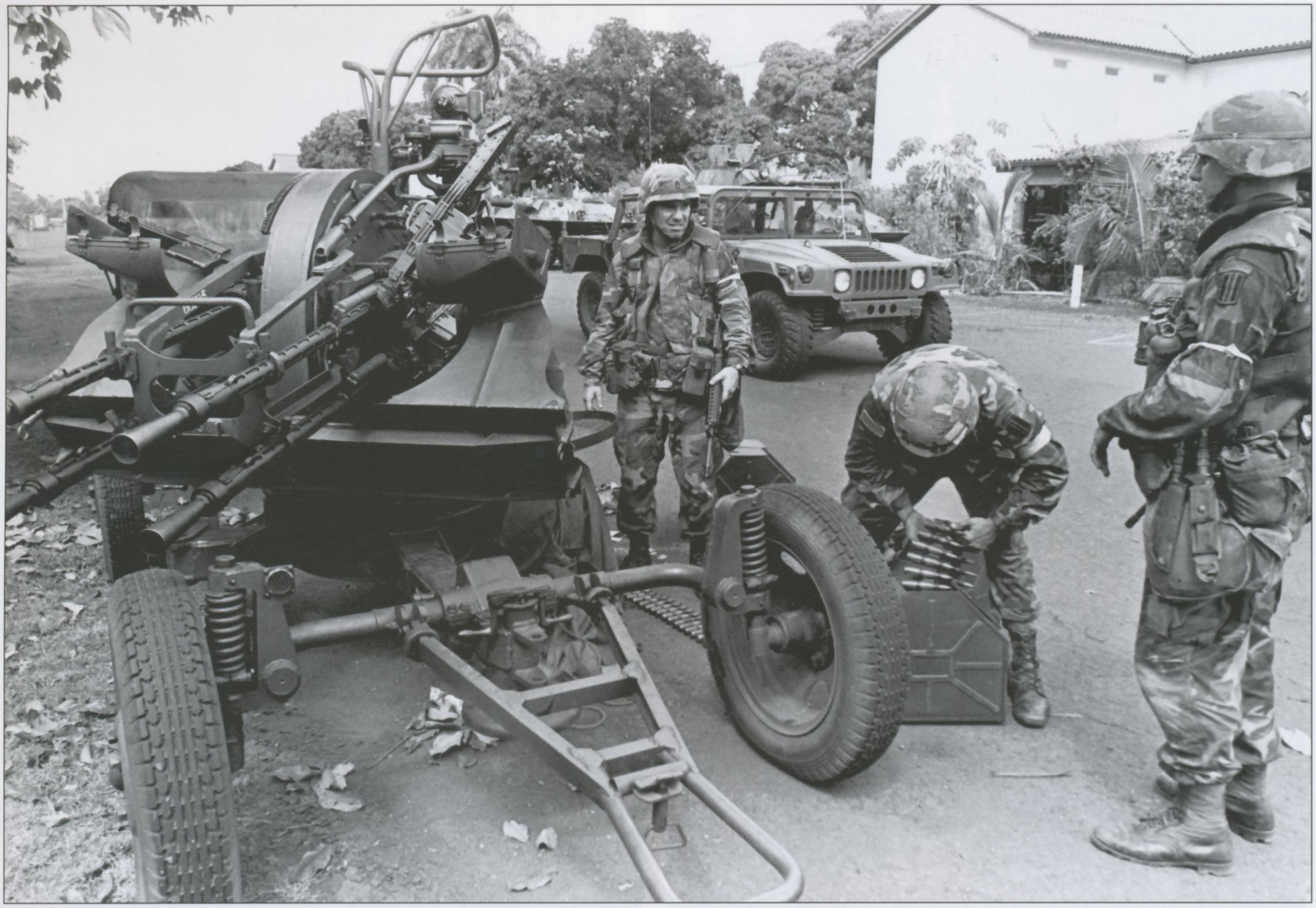
Virtually all objectives were secured and organized opposition destroyed within 12 hours of launching the operation. With just about all of the significant action occurring at night there are little in the way of photographs depicting action. Dawn revealed smoldering ruins where the PDF had futilely made a stand.



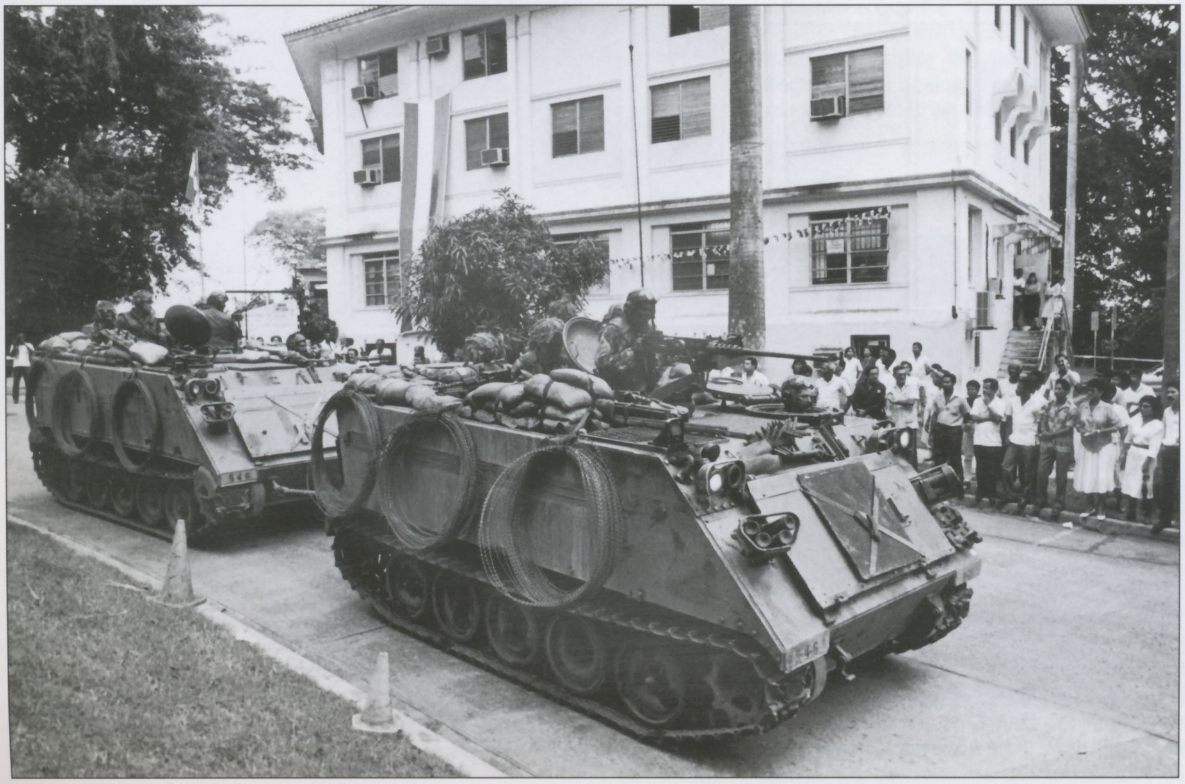
Soldiers of the 193d Infantry Brigade (Light) (Separate) stand guard at a battered PDF headquarters. 2-1/2-ton M35A2—"duce and a-half"—cargo trucks line the street. The 193d was based in Panama as the Panama Canal defense force. The staff sergeant to the left is armed with an M16A2 rifle and the man to the right with an M16A1. The weapons were not usually mixed in the same unit. The red grenade on the sergeant's suspenders is an AN-M14 incendiary grenade, red with black markings. The "thermite grenade" was used to destroy enemy equipment by setting it on a weapon or radio, for example, and igniting it to melt through steel.



A 193d Infantry Brigade soldier inspects the mangled remains of an automobile used by the PDF to transport weapons, which was run over by an M113A1 armored personnel carrier. The PDF and Dingbats made wide use of civilian vehicles to covertly transfer personnel, weapons, and equipment between installations to avoid detection by US forces.

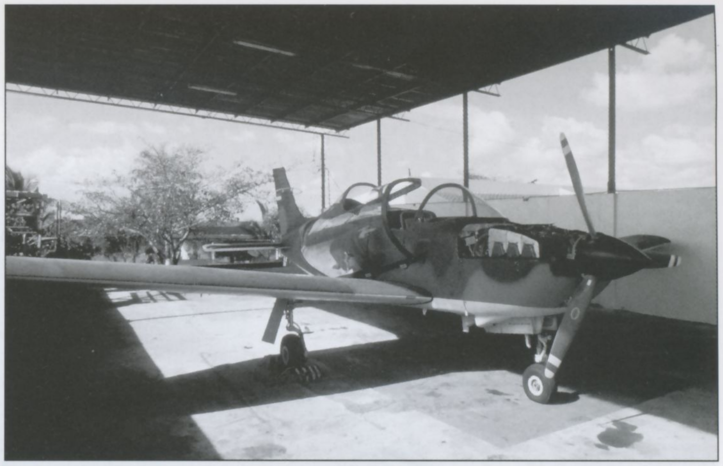


Paratroopers of the 193d Infantry Brigade's 1st Battalion (Airborne), 508th Infantry Regiment at Ft Amador examine a 14.5mm ZPU-4 antiaircraft machine gun. Besides serving as a part of the Panama Canal defense force it provided US Southern Command with an airborne battalion as a regional reaction force. Note the white 1-1/2-inch wide "engineer tape" armbands on their left upper arms as a means of friend-or-foe recognition. "Engineer tape," white cloth, no sticky backing, was normally used to mark minefield gaps and obstacles. The PDF used the same woodlands pattern uniforms and web gear as the US and some PDF units even had US Kevlar "Fritz" helmets. The PDF possessed a number of these deadly Soviet-made weapons, but they lacked radar-control or night vision sights greatly reducing their value. The PDF had no larger AA guns or any form of surface-to-air missile.

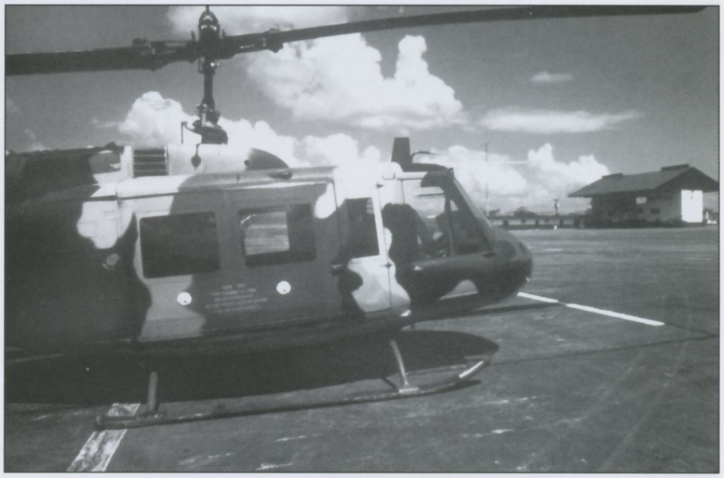


Two M113A2 armored personnel carriers of the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 6th Infantry Regiment. This battalion was detached from the 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Ft Polk, LA and attached to the 193d Infantry Brigade. The APCs proved invaluable for the assault on la Comandancía in Panama City, the PDF headquarters. The assault was considered the most vicious fighting during JUST CAUSE. An APC carried a rifle squad and was armed with a .50-cal. M2 machine gun. Note the green woven plastic sandbags fastened on top of the "track" for protection of the squad as they exposed themselves to fire from the top cargo hatch. Coils of concertina razor wire are fastened to the sides. These 50-foot rolls, when stretched out, were used to secure defensive positions or for crowd control.

A 193d Infantry Brigade warrant officer 1 displays two AK assault rifles. Several versions had been acquired by Panama and included Soviet, East German, and other Warsaw Pact state manufacture. The AK was replacing other shoulder weapons in the PDF, but M16A1, T-65, and other rifles were still in use. The US captured, confiscated, and recovered over 76,500 weapons of all types. The total Panamanian armed forces, police, other security forces, and the Dig Bats totaled no more than 17,000 personnel.

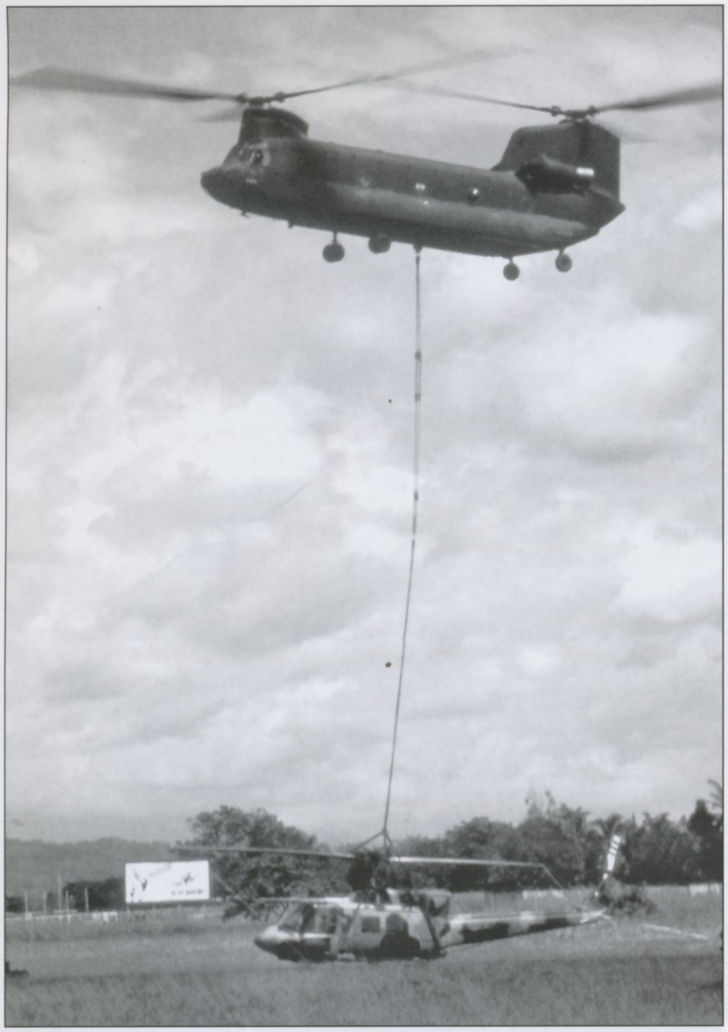


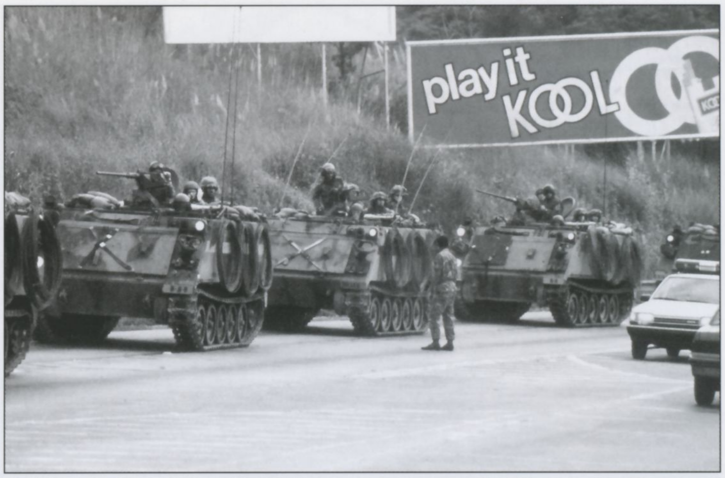
A Panamanian Air Force Chilean-made Enaer T-35D Pillán trainer aircraft. They were camouflage-painted and also used for search work. The Panamanian Air Force possessed ten of these in the B or D models. Most fixed-wing aircraft possessed by the PAF were used for VIP transport, liaison, observation, search and rescue, and flight training. Among these were three CASA C-212s, one DeHavilland DHC-3 Otter, two DeHavilland DHC-6 Twin Otters, one Short Skyvan, one Boeing 727, and two Cessnas.



A PAF Bell Model 205A1, the civilian equivalent of the UH-1H Huey Iroquois military helicopter. The PAF possessed 21 of these. Besides utility and light cargo transport, they were mainly used to support the 2nd Airborne Infantry Company. Prior to JUST CAUSE they were used to buzz US troops and civilians as a form of harassment and for surveillance of US military activity. These helicopters were armed with a 7.62mm M60D machine gun in each door. They were painted in a five-color camouflage pattern of forest green, olive drab, black, tan, and sand.

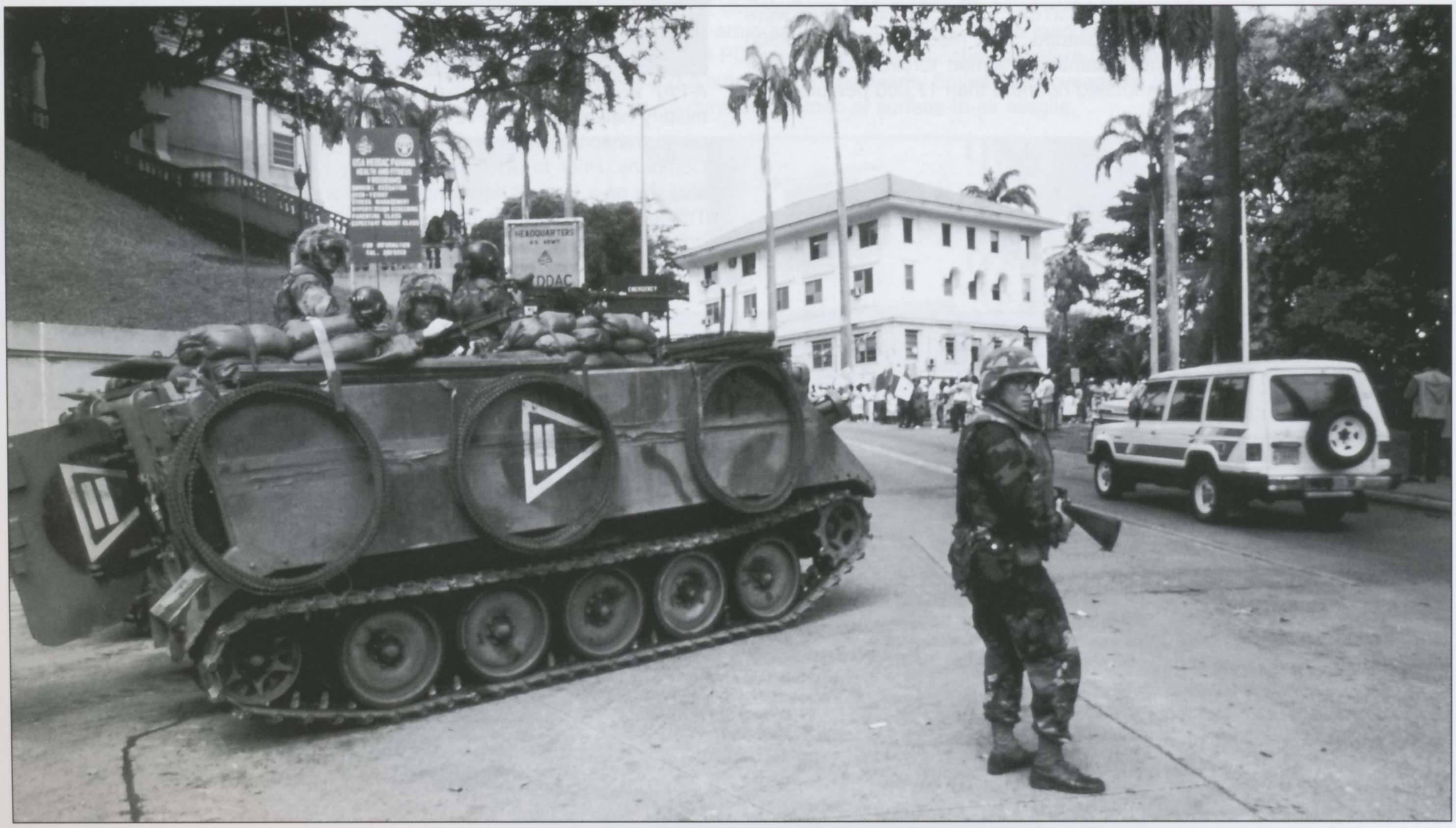
Parked US Army UH-60A Blackhawk utility helicopters on a US base. Blackhawks were widely used for airmobile assault, light cargo, utility, liaison, visual reconnaissance, command and control, and medical evacuation. They were armed with two 7.62mm M60D door guns. Helicopter support was extremely valuable to JUST CAUSE. Of the 167 helicopters employed by the US, three were downed by ground fire, one lost to a wire strike, and 41 damaged, all of but one which were returned to action within 24 hours.



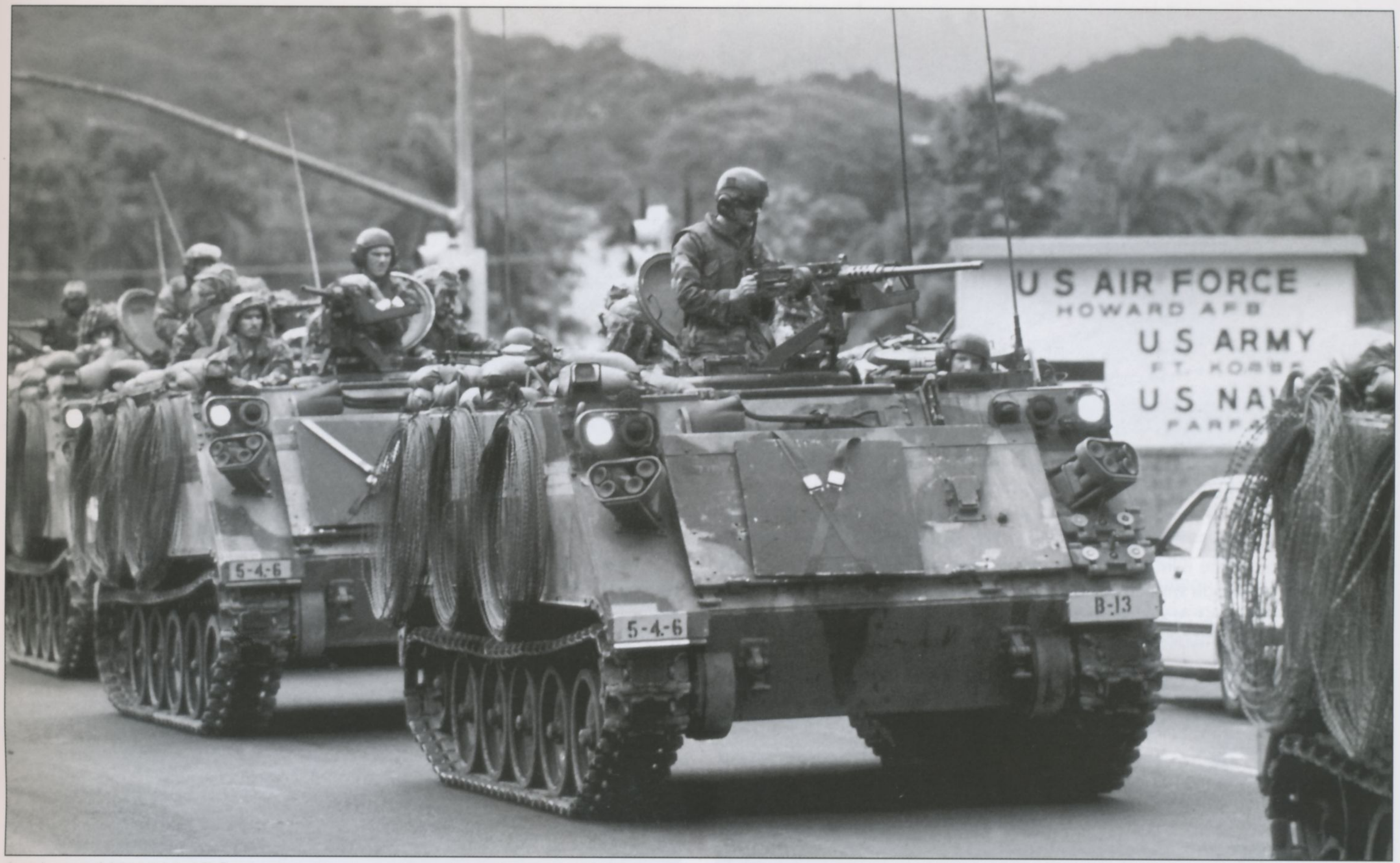


M113A3 APCs of the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 6th Infantry Regiment travel down a highway outside of Panama City. This was the only unit in Panama so equipped. The M113A3 could carry 13 troops including the driver. The 4-6th Infantry also employed M106A2 107mm (4.2-inch) mortar carriers and M557A2 "high hat" command post vehicles plus M113A3s modified as ambulances.

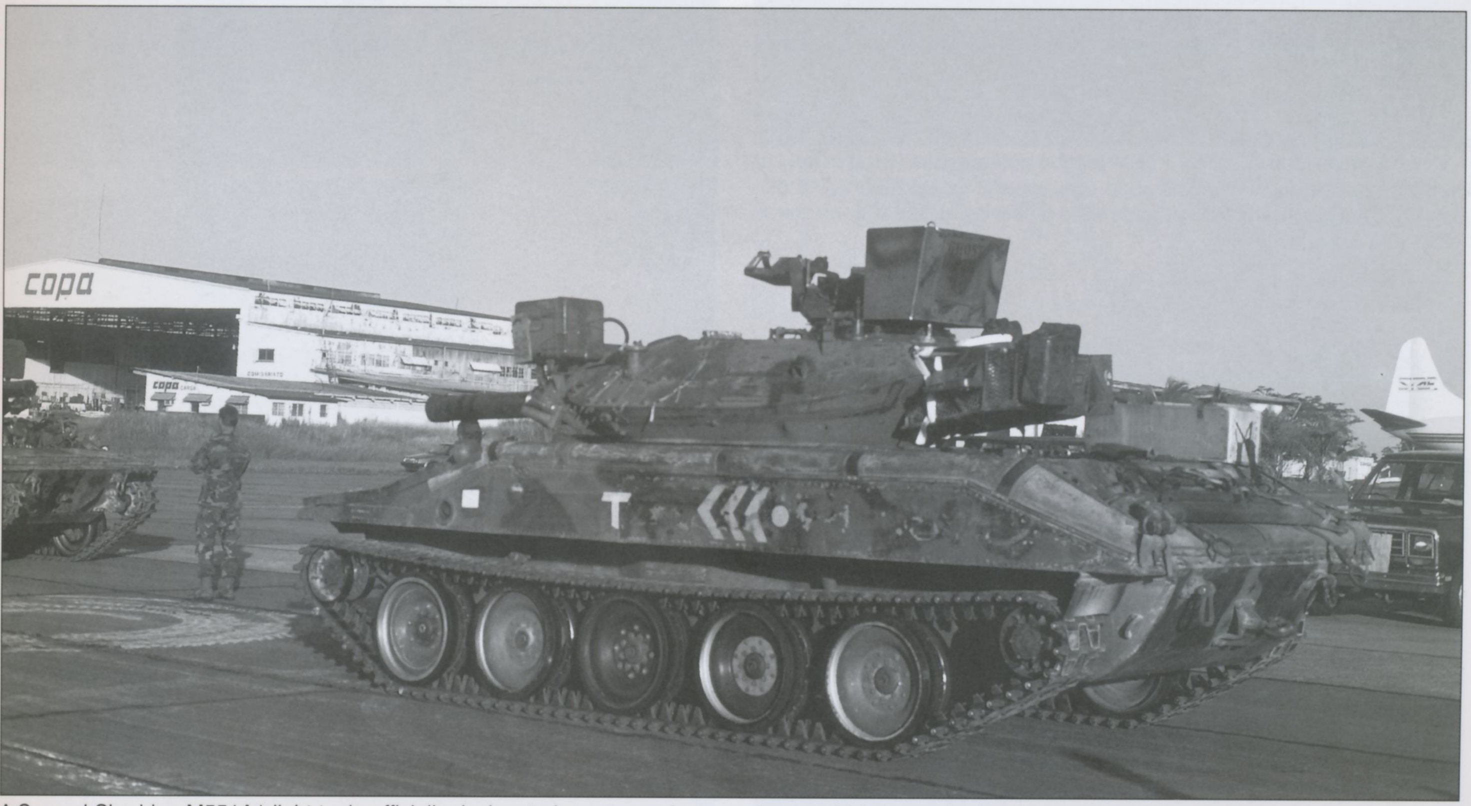
A US Boeing CH-47D Chinook cargo helicopter lifts a PAF Bell helicopter. All the Impounded PAF helicopters were assembled at a central location for evaluation and repair and eventually turned over to the new government. The CH-47D was the heavy lift chopper and could carry up to 44 troops or externally sling-load an artillery piece. US choppers were painted an infrared-absorbent dark green.



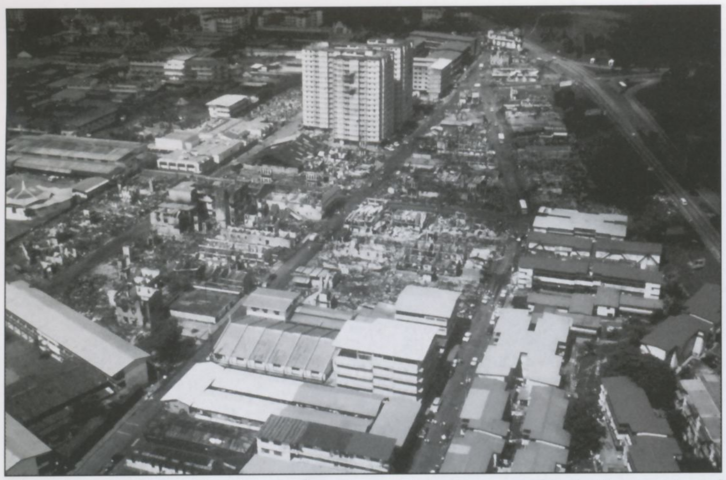
After the initial operations were completed M113A3s were used as mobile checkpoints and traffic control points. They provided protection from snipers, permitting exposed personnel to duck into them for cover. They could be moved to new locations at anytime. The side markings indicate the platoon and the individual vehicle. These varied from unit to unit; there was no standard Army-wide system.



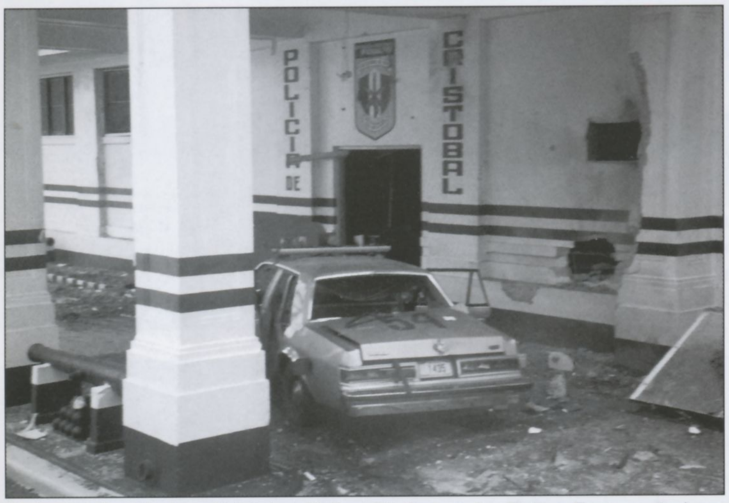
A column of M113A3 APCs rumble through the gates of Howard Air Force Base, which also served as the Army's Ft Kobbe and a Navy base. APCs were used for show of force patrols and battalion elements were positioned in different areas to quickly respond to any post-invasion incidents. The black on sand "5-4-6" on the right front track guard translated to 5th Infantry Division, 4th Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment. The left marking, in this case "B-13," means it is the thirteenth vehicle in Company B. The numbering of company vehicles included "soft-skin" trucks and the system gave no indication as to what company element a particular vehicle belonged to.



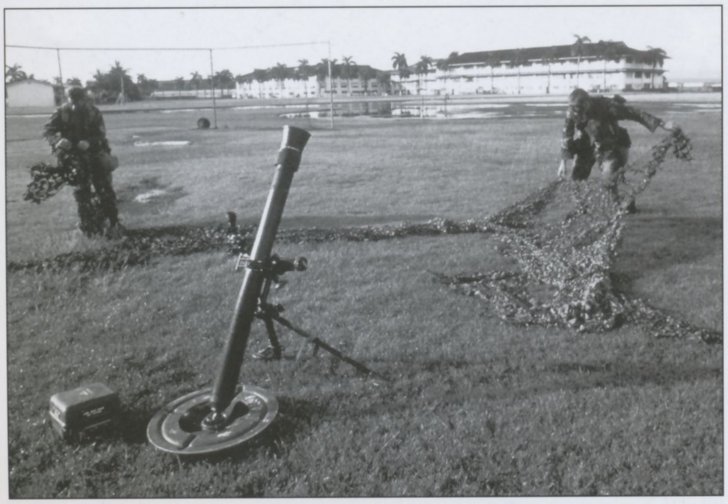
A General Sheridan M551A1 light tank; officially designated an armored reconnaissance/airborne assault vehicle. Eight of these vehicles were employed in Panama being assigned to Company C (-), 3d Battalion (Light) (Airborne), 73d Armor Regiment of the only airborne tank battalion in the Army. The Sheridan is armed with a 152mm M81 gun/missile launcher that could fire high-explosive and high-explosive antitank (HEAT) rounds or a MGM-51 Shillelagh wire-guided antitank missile. Besides being air-droppable, the Sheridan is amphibious, with preparation. The side markings indicate the platoon and the individual vehicle. (Robert F. Dorr photo)



The rubbled ruins of la Comandancía can be seen roughly in the center of the photograph to the right of the red-roofed buildings near the left edge and below the high-rise apartment buildings at the top-center. This was the main headquarters for the PDF and the site of a vicious all-night battle fought by Task Force Gator. The fight lasted through the day and the stronghold finally fell in the late afternoon with heavy casualties on both sides. The assault was supported by M113A3 APCs, Sheridan tanks, and Marine LAVs as well as AC-130H Spectre gunships and AH-64A Apache attack helicopters.

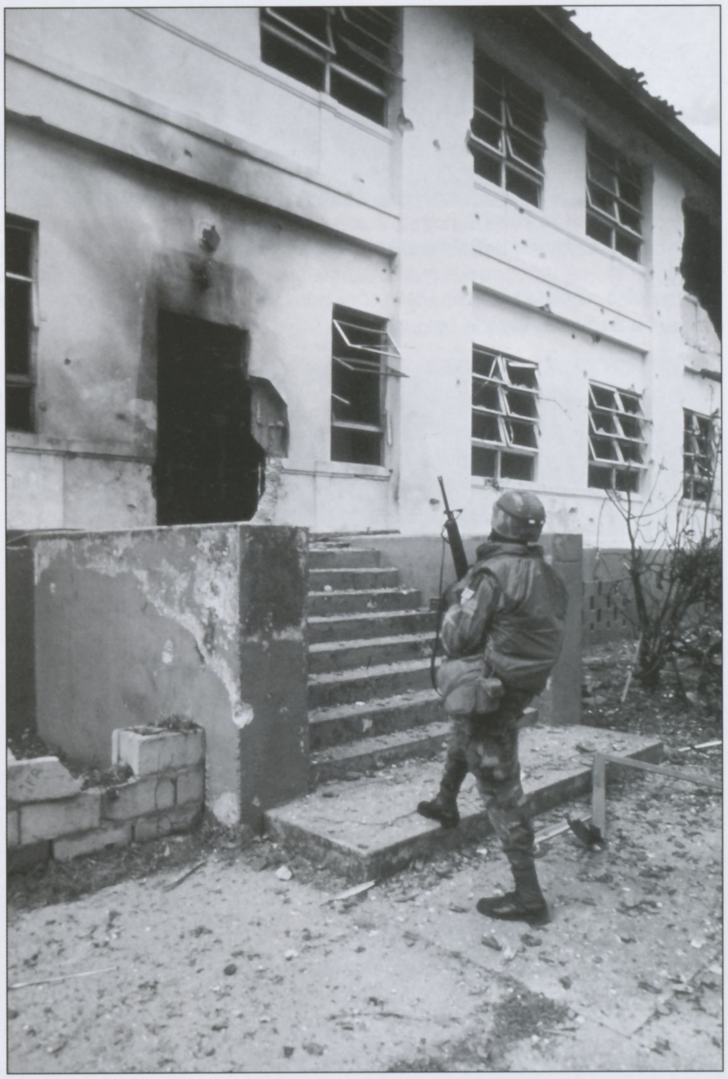


A view of the shot-up Cristobal Police Station and a Police Force patrol car on the "Atlantic side." Panama's north side actually abutted the Caribbean Sea. Over the door is the PDF insignia worn on the left shoulder by all armed forces and police personnel.

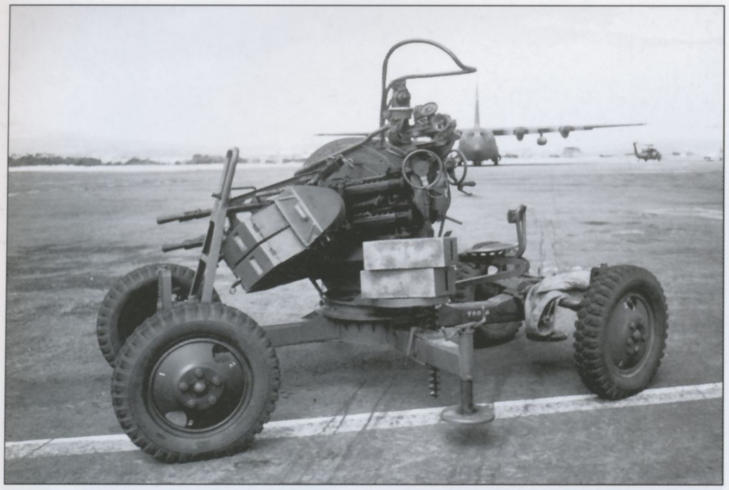


An 81mm M252 mortar crew stretches out a camouflage net around their position on a baseball field. The olive drab box beside the mortar is the sight case. The M252 mortar is a copy of the of British L16A2 mortar. Baseball is an extremely popular sport in Panama and all military bases of any size possessed a baseball field along with football (soccer) fields, and basketball and volleyball courts.

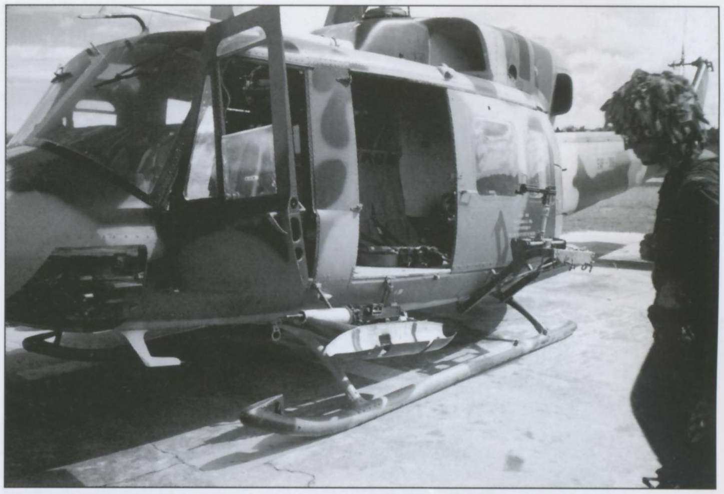
A PDF warehouse from which sniper fire was received and a small headquarters building. There were large numbers of PDF, police, and other security forces headquarters, posts, stations, and other facilities scattered throughout the country. All had to be checked for occupation, searched for documents of intelligence value, and weapons, ammunition and equipment secured. There was a concern that holdouts and criminal elements would acquire these. A weapons buy-back program was initiated and anyone turning in a weapon was paid $150.



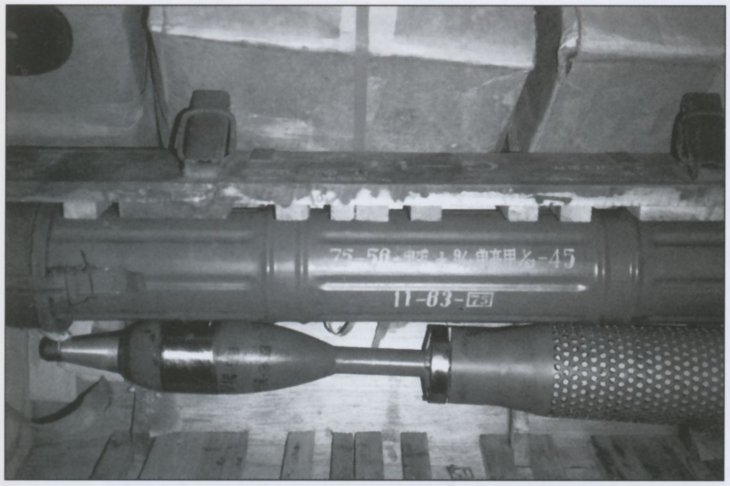
A PDF headquarters building peppered by small arms, LAWs, and 40mm grenades. It was discovered that many of the weapons were less than effective against the reinforced concrete construction buildings of Central American. Wood was simply not used in construction as it would deteriorate in the hot-wet climate and fall to termites. Another deficiency was that US troops were not sufficiently trained in the proper use of demolition materials used to breech buildings resulting in numerous unsafe acts and ineffective use of the demolition items.



A captured 14.5mm (.58-cal.) ZPU-4 quad antiaircraft machine gun. The four ammunition cans each hold 1,200 rounds of armor-piercing incendiary and armor-piercing incendiary-tracer. A well trained five-man crew can bring the carriage-mounted gun into action in 15-20 seconds. Regardless, the American airborne assault came as such a surprise and was accomplished so swiftly that few were placed in operation. A C-130H transport can be seen in the distinct background. Some of these weapons were acquired by US units, returned to their home stations, and displayed as outdoor war trophies.

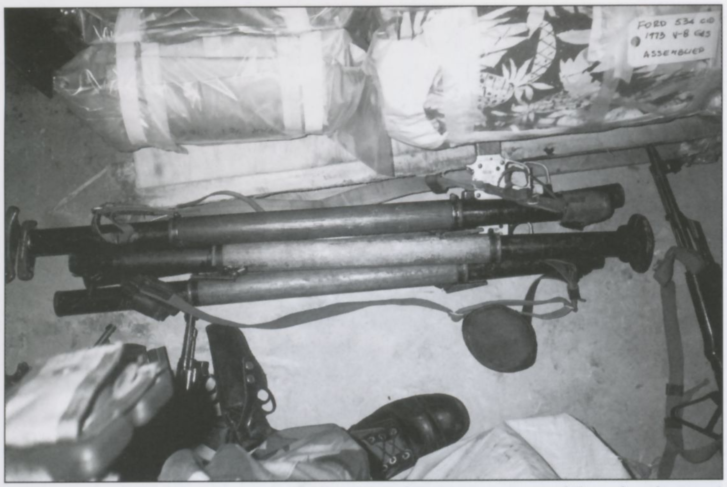


This PAF Bell Model 205A1 helicopter had a 7.62mm MAG machine gun mounted in a pod on each side at the forward skid leg. Its cover has been opened to allow the gun to be cleaned. The pedestal mounts for the M60D door guns can be seen with the gun removed. This particular helicopter is painted in a dark and light green and sand camouflage pattern.



Chinese 75mm Type 56 recoilless rifle and HEAT ammunition. The Type 56 is a modified copy of the old US M20 recoilless rifle. The US version used a spin-stabilized HEAT round, which provided very poor armor penetration. The Chinese HEAT round was fin-stabilized (the fins are inside the cartridge case) and had much more effective penetration.

Impounded East German 7.62mm MPiKMS-72 assault rifles with folding stocks, AKMs, and other weapons. The PDF possessed sufficient AKs and ammunition to rearm all personnel, but the 5.56mm M16A1 and T-65 rifles were still in wide use, sometimes with weapons and calibers mixed in unit. This served to confuse logistics and the 7.62mm round would have been much more effective for combat in built-up areas. The 5.56mm has poor penetration through typical building construction materials.



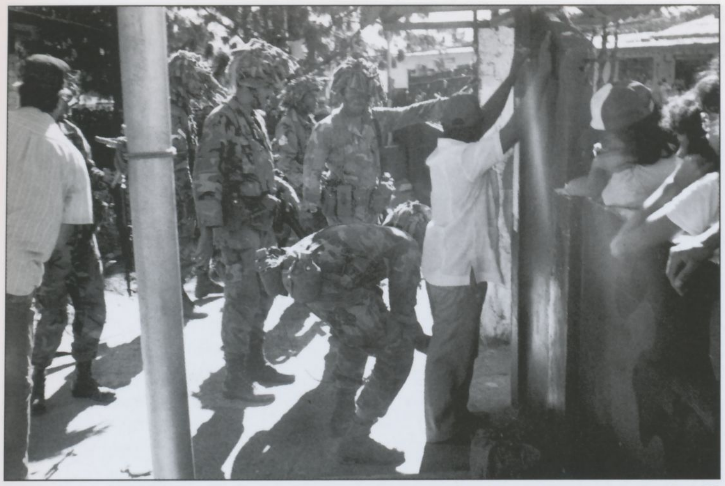
Chinese-made 40mm Type 56 antitank projectors, a copy of the obsolescent Soviet RPG-2 “rocket propelled grenade.” The PDF also possessed the much improved Chinese Type 67, a copy of the Soviet RPG-7. Some M113A3 APCs were hit by RPG-7 rounds during the battle for la Comandancía, but no serious damage was inflicted. RPG-7s were also fired at helicopters.

Countless checkpoints were established throughout the country, especially in urban areas. Travel inside Panama City was difficult because of the number of checkpoints. They were not so much for apprehending at-large PDF, but to find Noriega and a few of his key lieutenants. Confiscating weapons was another reason for the checkpoint.

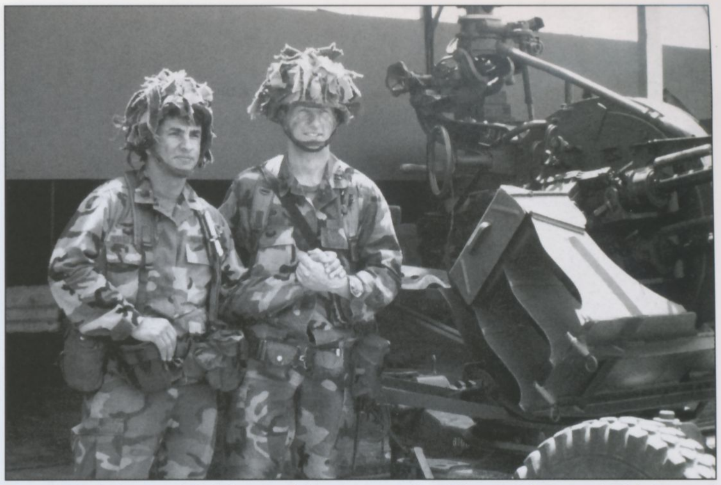
Street patrols were constant throughout the country. With the entire 7th Infantry Division now in the country, along with other units, there were more than enough troops available for saturation patrolling.

Many PDF and Dig Bats changed into civilian clothes to avoid arrest or to blend in with the population in an effort to conduct hit-and-run attacks on US forces. Panamanians were issued national identity cards and those without one were arrested and questioned. Some PDF had discarded their wallets in hope of avoiding arrest.

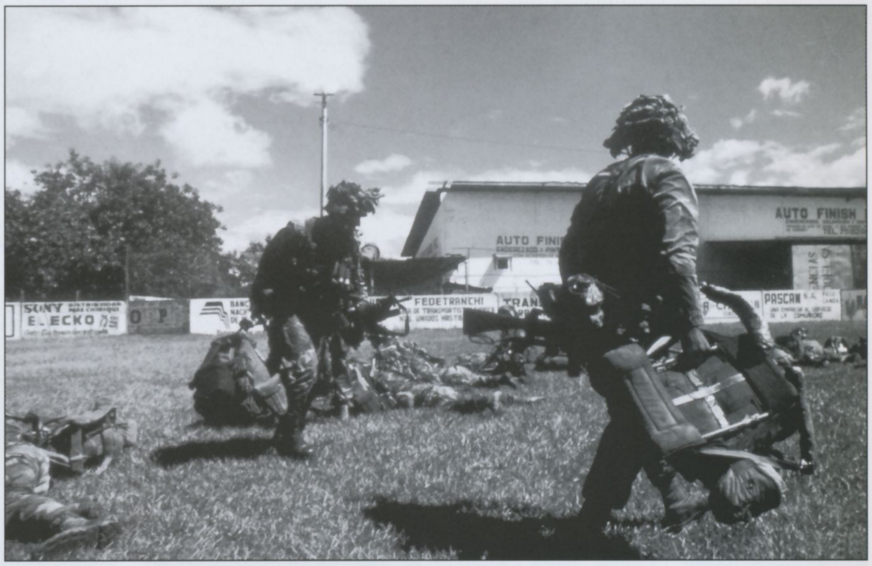
Patrols were constantly on the lookout for caches of weapons and ammunition. Every abandoned building was searched, often several times as it was suspected that arms and munitions were being moved about.



Panamanian civilian employees were searched as they entered US installations to work. Some had been employed by Noriega intelligence apparatus to collect information and report American activities. They failed to detect the preparations for JUST CAUSE.

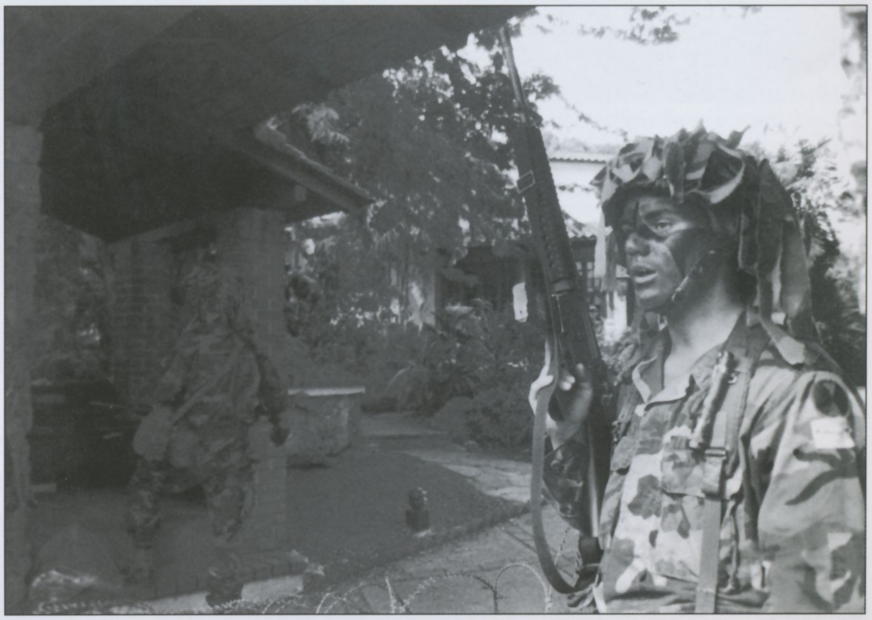


Two 7th Infantry Division soldiers pose beside a 14.5mm ZPU-4 quad machine gun.

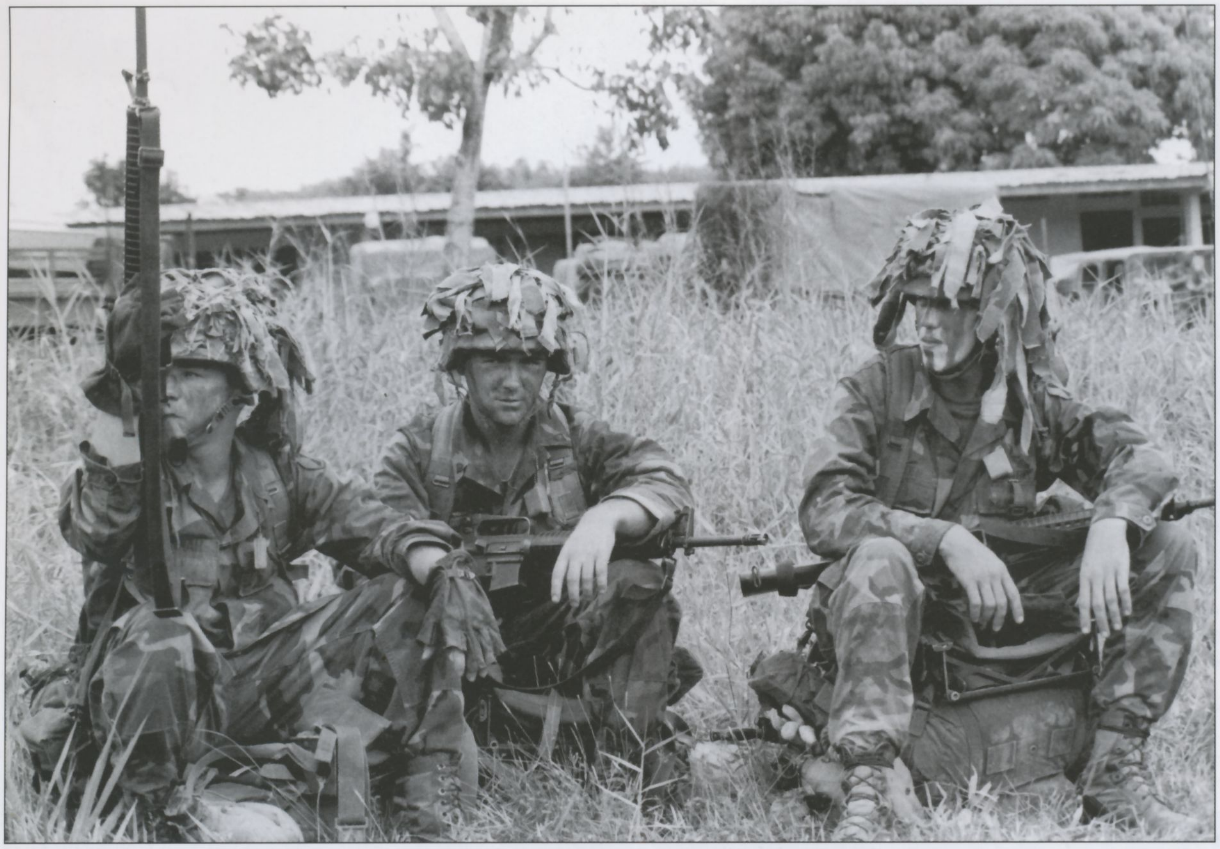


Units were maintained on alert as rapid response forces to react to any situations, cordon off buildings suspected as Noriega hideouts, or to reinforce other units. These 7th Infantry Division soldiers scramble to load into a helicopter on a football field where they were waiting on alert.

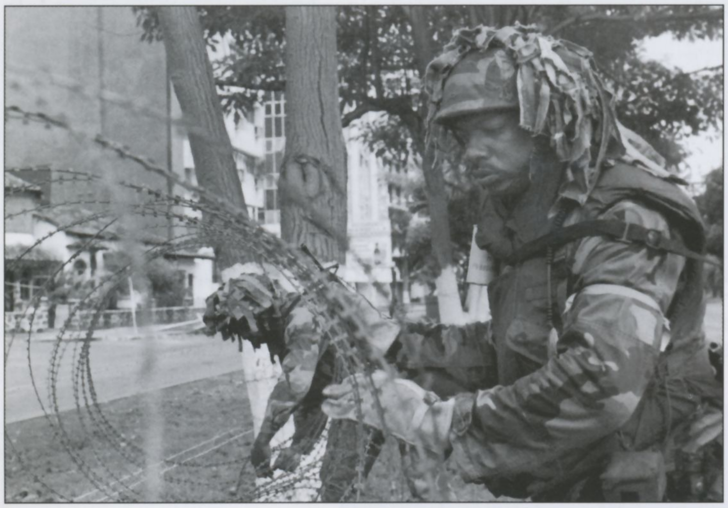
A 7th Infantry Division grenadier on lookout.



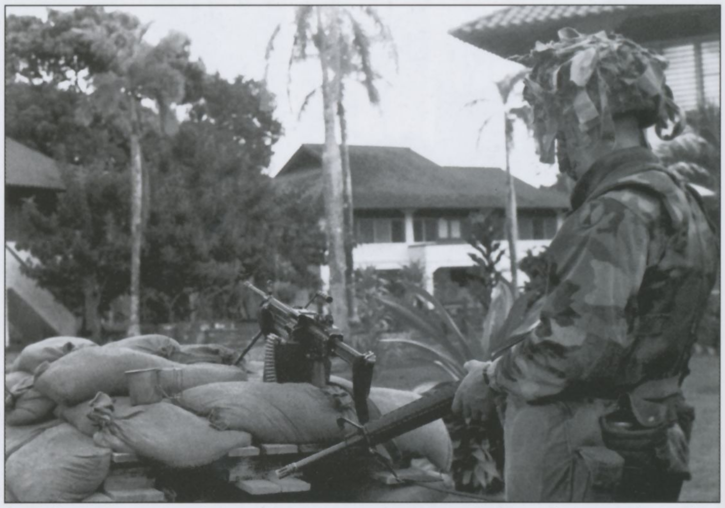
This M16A2 rifle-armed infantryman has a small square white cloth safety-pinned to his left shoulder for friend-or-foe identification below the 7th Infantry Division shoulder sleeve insignia, informally called a patch.



Infantrymen wait to load out aboard helicopters. Their rifles' magazines have been removed as a safety measure for administrative flights. The small light green plastic containers on their jacket top buttonholes hold earplugs. These are worn as an everyday component of the soldier's uniform. Note the gloves of man to the left. These are standard black leather field gloves with the finger tips cut off. This protected the hands in dense vegetation and when working among buildings, but allowed weapons to be operated without hindrance.

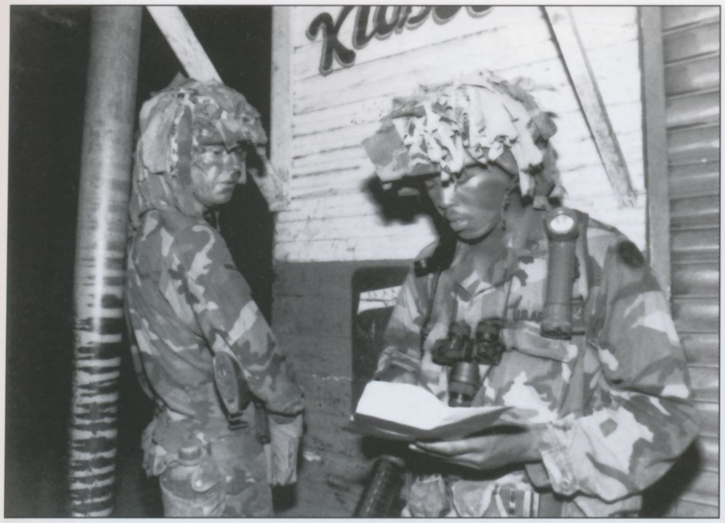


Soldiers erect a razor wire concertina barrier using heavy-duty tan work gloves. A coil of spring-steel concertina wire stretched out to about 50-feet and was just over three-feet (one-meter) in diameter.



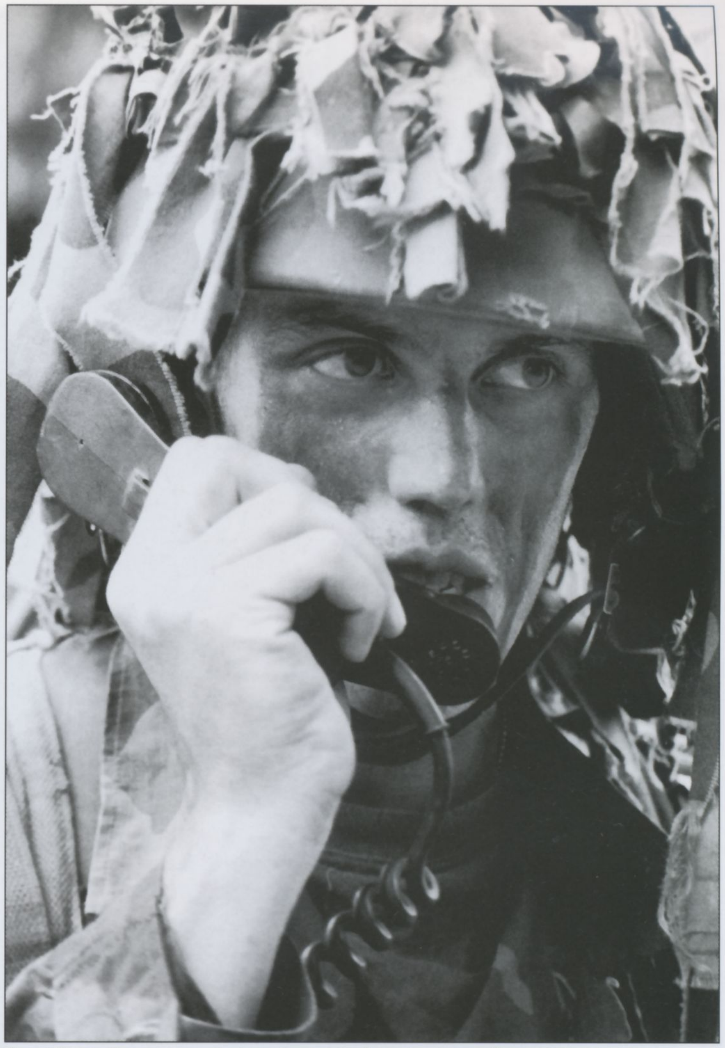
An infantryman stands guard at a post constructed of sandbags and wooden pallets. One of squad's two 5.56mm M249 squad automatic weapons sits in readiness. The SAW was fed by a 200-round belt contained in a plastic box magazine. A canteen cup with two-piece folding wire handles can be seen to the left.

A renegade PDF soldier is arrested and loaded aboard a truck as a TV2 cameraman videotapes the event. TV2 was the main Panamanian television station. A Special Forces team had raided the station at the beginning of the operation and removed vital components of the transmitter without damaging it. This prevented Noriega supporters from broadcasting propaganda. Once the situation was under control the components were reinstalled and the station placed back in operation for public service announcements by the new government.

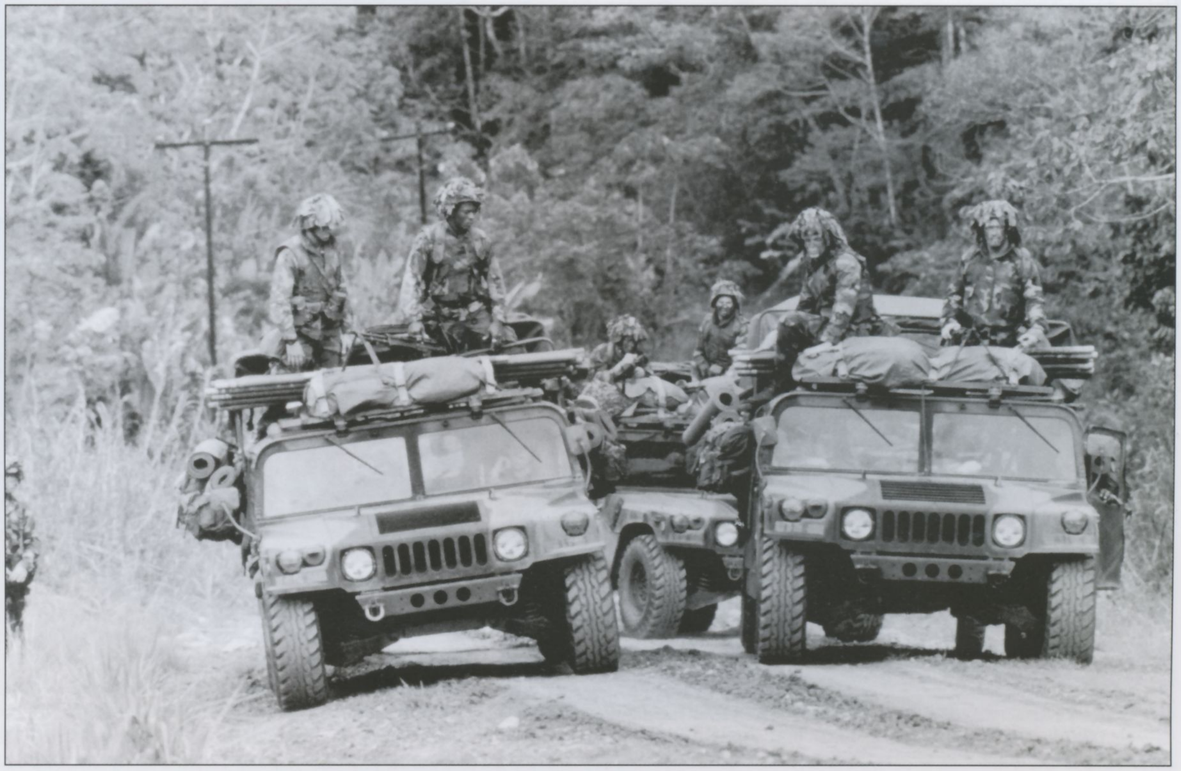


Street patrols were conducted around the clock. It was suspected that some movement of arms was conducted in the early morning hours. The staff sergeant to the right has a TL-122 flashlight clipped to his suspenders and an AN/PVS-7 night vision goggles (NVG) slung around his neck.

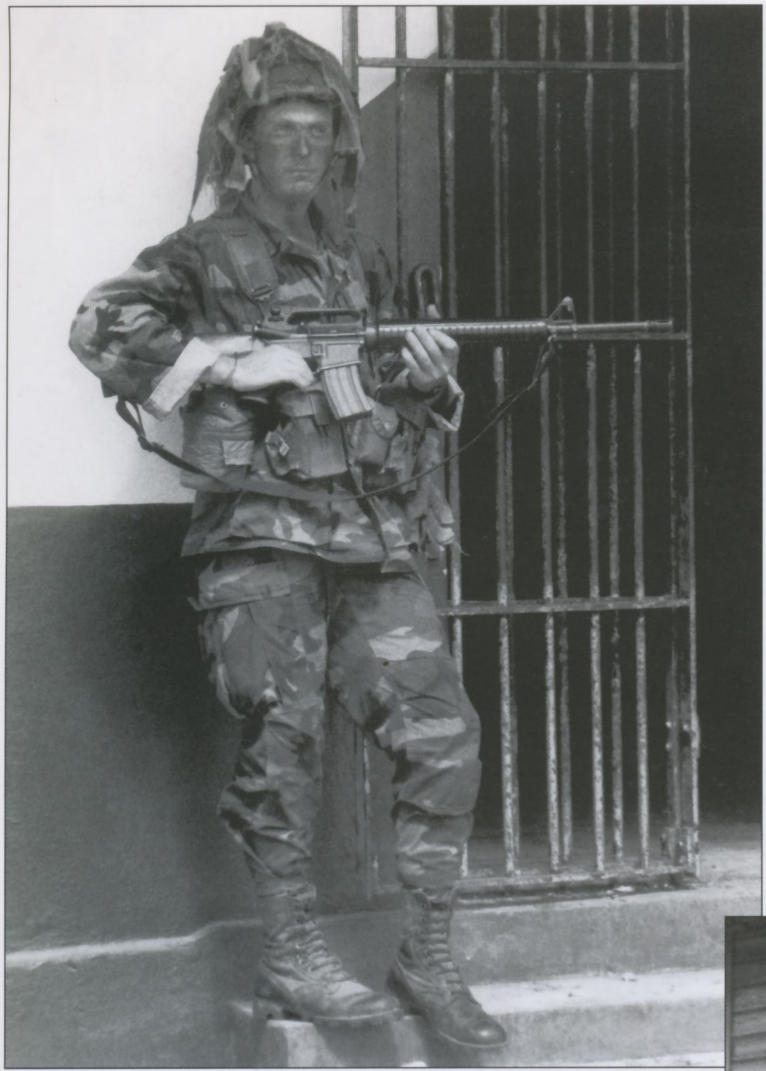
Civilians entering a military base are lined up for entry procedures, search and identification check. Troops continued to wear helmets and body armor because of snipers, drive-by shootings, and grenade attacks, though these were rare.



A soldier talks on a radio handset. His face is camouflaged, but his hands are not, a common practice. Hands were usually rubbed clean rather quickly and most troops simply did not bother to apply camouflage paste on them.



Foot and motorized patrols were conducted throughout the country side. These turned up little. There were no renegade units or guerrilla bands forming. At-large PDF holdouts hid in the cities. These HMMWVs have camouflage net rolls and poles strapped to the top of the cabs on which sit M60 machine guns. Rucksacks are suspended on the sides of the vehicles as there was insufficient room in the cargo compartment when filled with troops.

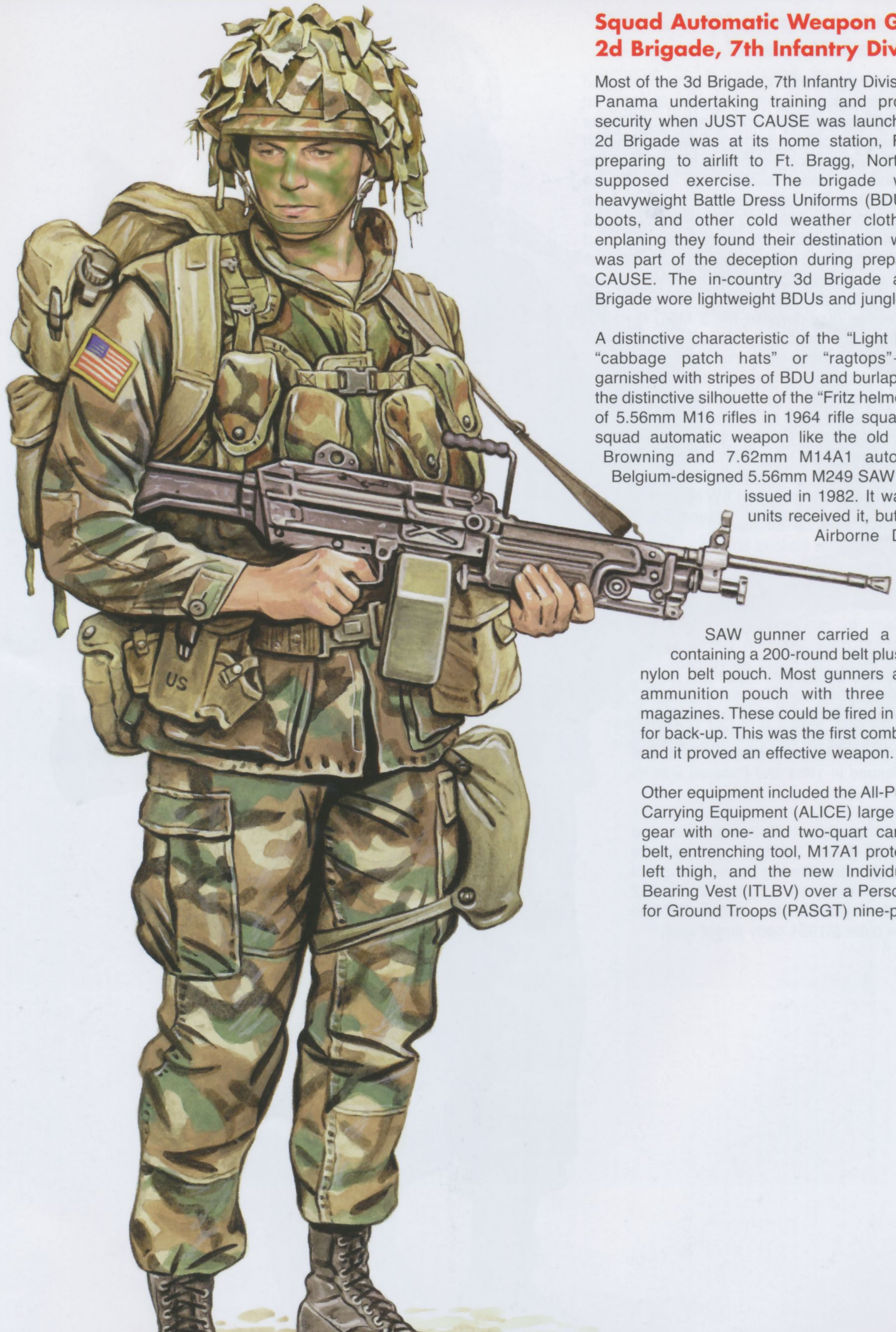


A sentry at the entrance of a military headquarters. He wears tropical combat boots, generally known as "jungle boots," with olive drab canvas upper and black leather lower portions. These were very popular owing to their lighter weight, they dried out faster when wet, and were cooler than all-leather boots.

Patrols were asked to treat many minor injuries encountered among civilians. Surprising numbers had been hit by shell and secondary fragments even when they were at a considerable distance from the action.

Street patrols were conducted attracting many curious on-lookers, especially children.

Individuals carrying boxes and other parcels were inspected regardless of what they looked like. Noriega supporter holdouts sometimes used unlikely appearing persons, often relatives or anyone wanting a few dollars, to transport items rather than carry it themselves and possibly be caught. Patrols simply ignored obviously looted goods, it was so widespread.



Squad Automatic Weapon Gunner, 2d Brigade, 7th Infantry Division (Light)

Most of the 3d Brigade, 7th Infantry Division was already in Panama undertaking training and providing additional security when JUST CAUSE was launched. The division's 2d Brigade was at its home station, Ft. Ord, California preparing to airlift to Ft. Bragg, North Carolina for a supposed exercise. The brigade was outfitted in heavyweight Battle Dress Uniforms (BDU), leather combat boots, and other cold weather clothing. Just before enplaning they found their destination was Panama. This was part of the deception during preparations for JUST CAUSE. The in-country 3d Brigade and follow-on 1st Brigade wore lightweight BDUs and jungle boots.

A distinctive characteristic of the "Light Fighters" were the "cabbage patch hats" or "ragtops"—Kevlar helmets garnished with stripes of BDU and burlap fabric to break up the distinctive silhouette of the "Fritz helmet." Since the issue of 5.56mm M16 rifles in 1964 rifle squads were without a squad automatic weapon like the old .30-cal. M1918A2 Browning and 7.62mm M14A1 automatic rifles. The Belgium-designed 5.56mm M249 SAW finally began to be issued in 1982. It was years before all units received it, but the Rangers, 82d Airborne Division, and the light infantry divisions were the first to be issued it. The SAW gunner carried a plastic magazine containing a 200-round belt plus another in a large nylon belt pouch. Most gunners also carried a rifle ammunition pouch with three 30-round M16A2 magazines. These could be fired in the SAW and were for back-up. This was the first combat use of the SAW and it proved an effective weapon.

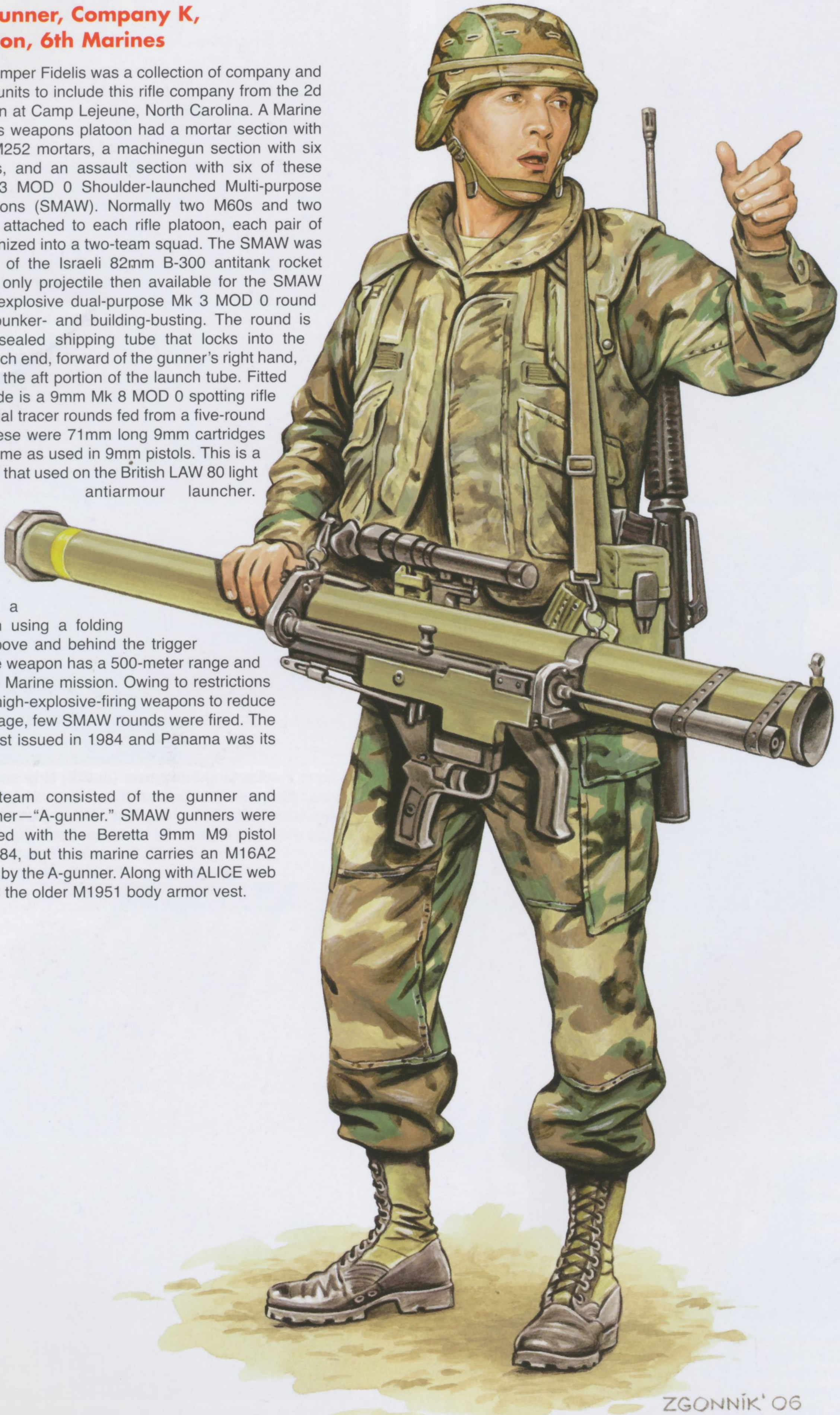
Other equipment included the All-Purpose Lightweight Carrying Equipment (ALICE) large rucksack and web gear with one- and two-quart canteens, equipment belt, entrenching tool, M17A1 protective mask on his left thigh, and the new Individual Tactical Load Bearing Vest (ITLBV) over a Personal Armor System for Ground Troops (PASGT) nine-pound armor vest.

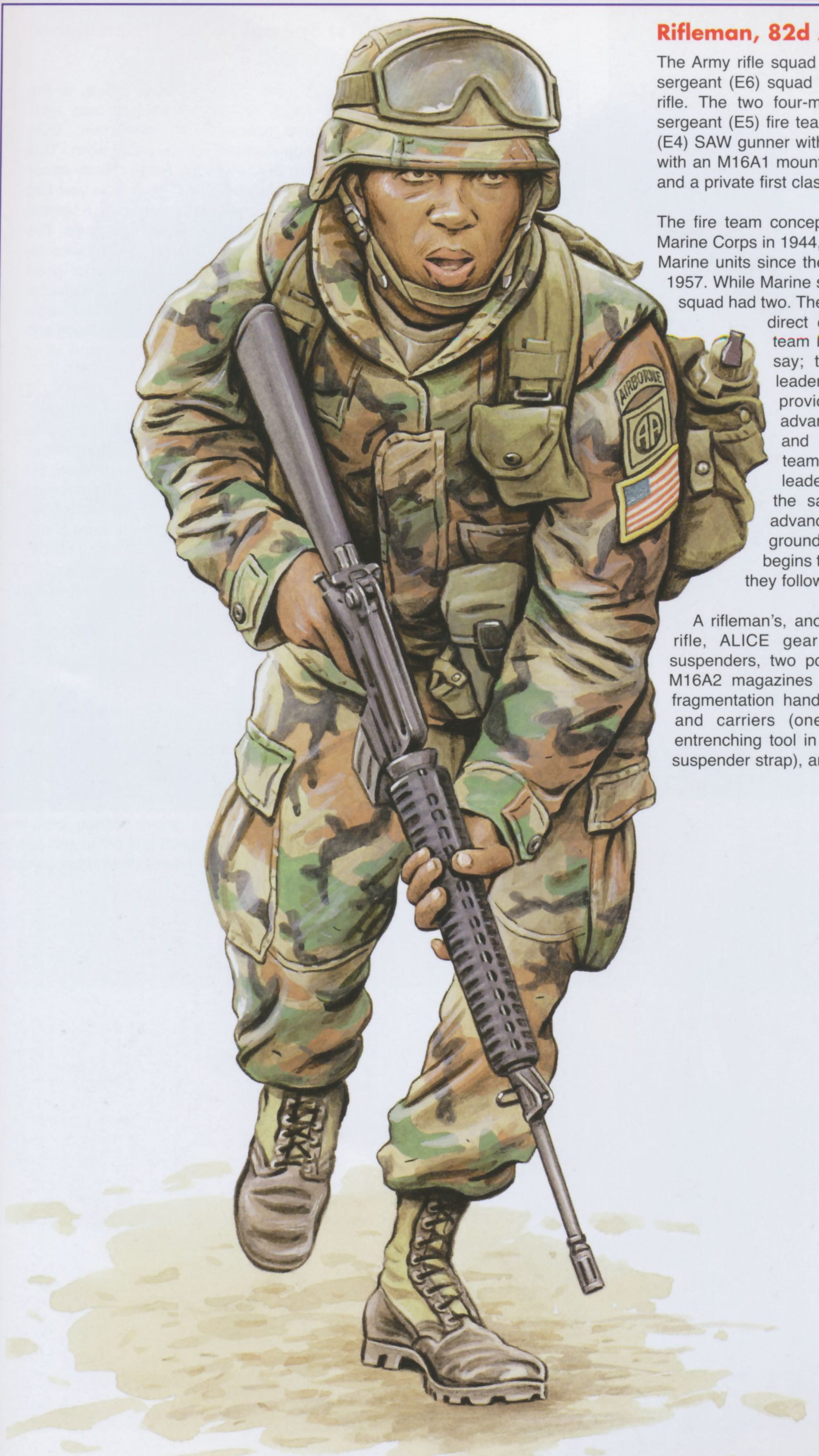
Assault Gunner, Company K, 3d Battalion, 6th Marines

Task Force Semper Fidelis was a collection of company and smaller sized units to include this rifle company from the 2d Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. A Marine rifle company's weapons platoon had a mortar section with three 60mm M252 mortars, a machinegun section with six 7.62mm M60s, and an assault section with six of these 83mm Mk 153 MOD 0 Shoulder-launched Multi-purpose Assault Weapons (SMAW). Normally two M60s and two SMAWs were attached to each rifle platoon, each pair of weapons organized into a two-team squad. The SMAW was an adaptation of the Israeli 82mm B-300 antitank rocket launcher. The only projectile then available for the SMAW was the high-explosive dual-purpose Mk 3 MOD 0 round intended for bunker- and building-busting. The round is packed in a sealed shipping tube that locks into the weapon's breech end, forward of the gunner's right hand, and serves as the aft portion of the launch tube. Fitted on the right side is a 9mm Mk 8 MOD 0 spotting rifle that fires special tracer rounds fed from a five-round magazine. These were 71mm long 9mm cartridges and not the same as used in 9mm pistols. This is a modification of that used on the British LAW 80 light antiarmour launcher.

The SMAW could be fired from the shoulder or from the ground in a prone position using a folding bipod seen above and behind the trigger pistol grip. The weapon has a 500-meter range and is ideal for the Marine mission. Owing to restrictions on the use of high-explosive-firing weapons to reduce collateral damage, few SMAW rounds were fired. The SMAW was first issued in 1984 and Panama was its combat début.

The SMAW team consisted of the gunner and assistant gunner—"A-gunner." SMAW gunners were normally armed with the Beretta 9mm M9 pistol adopted in 1984, but this marine carries an M16A2 rifle as carried by the A-gunner. Along with ALICE web gear he wears the older M1951 body armor vest.





Rifleman, 82d Airborne Division

The Army rifle squad consisted of nine men led by a staff sergeant (E6) squad leader armed with a 5.56mm M16A2 rifle. The two four-man fire teams each consisted of a sergeant (E5) fire team leader with an M16A2, a specialist (E4) SAW gunner with a M249 SAW, a specialist grenadier with an M16A1 mounting a 40mm M203 grenade launcher, and a private first class (E3) rifleman with an M16A2.

The fire team concept had been formally adopted by the Marine Corps in 1944, it had been unofficially used by some Marine units since the 1930s, and adopted by the Army in 1957. While Marine squads had three fire teams, the Army squad had two. The concept required the squad leader to direct only the two fire team leaders. The team leaders did not direct their troops per say; they lead by example. They squad leader may direct one fire team leader to provide covering fire and the other to advance in bounds alternating their rushes and providing suppressive fire. The fire team members simply do what their team leader does. When he opens fire they fire in the same direction. When he is up and advancing they move. When he hits the ground so do they. When he gets up and begins to circle around to a flank without firing they follow.

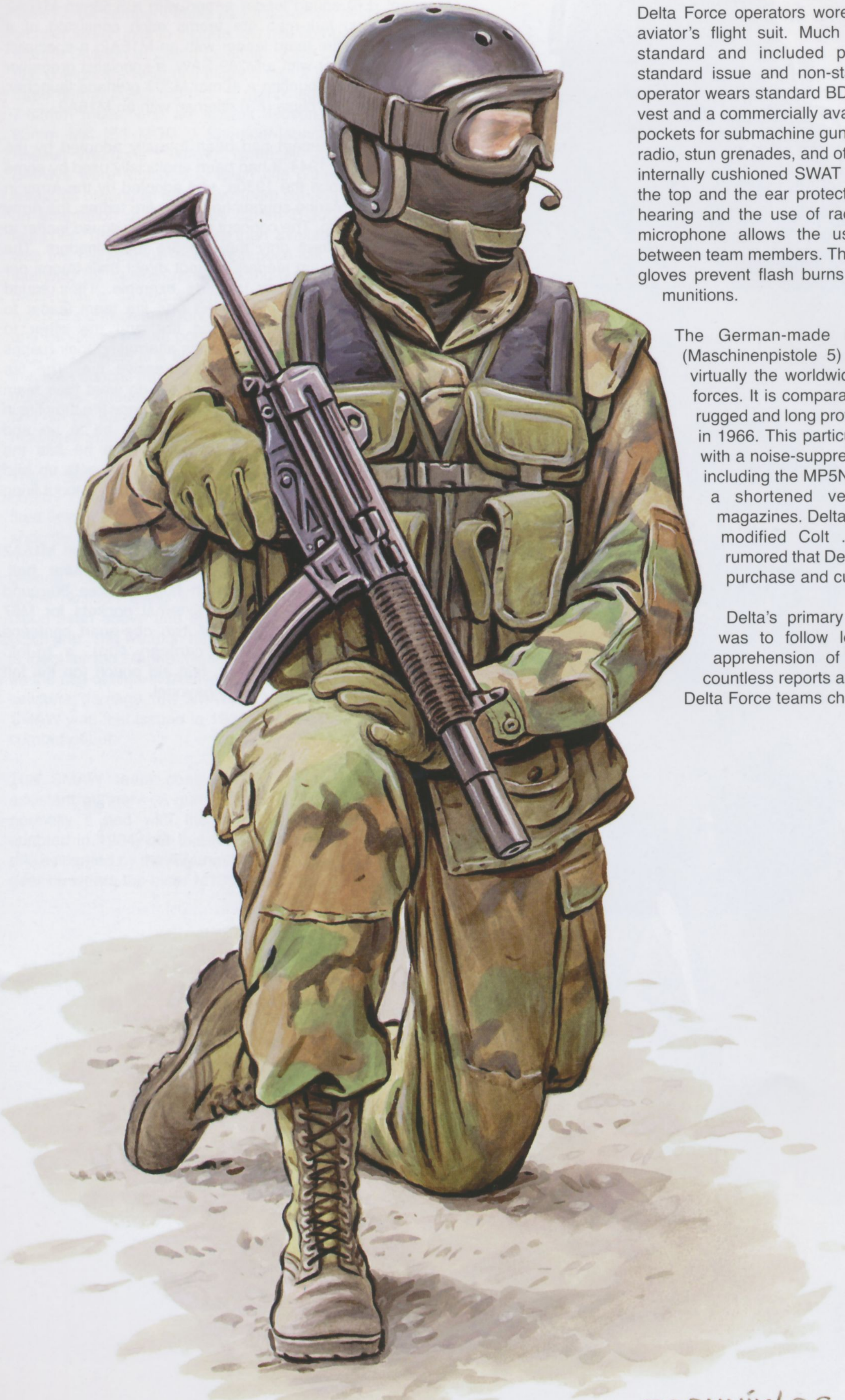
A rifleman's, and most others armed with an M16A2 rifle, ALICE gear consists of the equipment belt, suspenders, two pouches each holding three 30-round M16A2 magazines (with two external pockets for M67 fragmentation hand grenades), two one-quart canteens and carriers (one with a canteen cup), a tri-fold entrenching tool in a carrier, first aid pouch (on the left suspender strap), and an M9 bayonet.

Operator, 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment Delta

Delta Force operators wore civilian clothes, BDUs, or the aviator's flight suit. Much of their equipment was non-standard and included police SWAT-style gear. Both standard issue and non-standard boots were worn. This operator wears standard BDUs with the PASGT body armor vest and a commercially available SWAT vest. This vest has pockets for submachine gun and pistol magazines, a tactical radio, stun grenades, and other minor equipment items. The internally cushioned SWAT helmet has ventilation holes on the top and the ear protectors are open to allow for good hearing and the use of radio handsets. A voice-activated microphone allows the use of a special tactical radio between team members. The fire-resistant Nomex hood and gloves prevent flash burns from stun grenades and other munitions.

The German-made Heckler & Koch 9mm MP5 (Maschinenpistole 5) submachine gun had become virtually the worldwide standard for counter-terrorist forces. It is comparatively heavy and expensive, but rugged and long proven reliable since its introduction in 1966. This particular model is the MP5A3S fitted with a noise-suppressor. Other variants were in use including the MP5N used by the SEALs and MP5K, a shortened version. MP5s used 30-round magazines. Delta operators are also armed with a modified Colt .45-cal. M1911A1 pistol. It is rumored that Delta operators receive a stipend to purchase and customize an M1911A1.

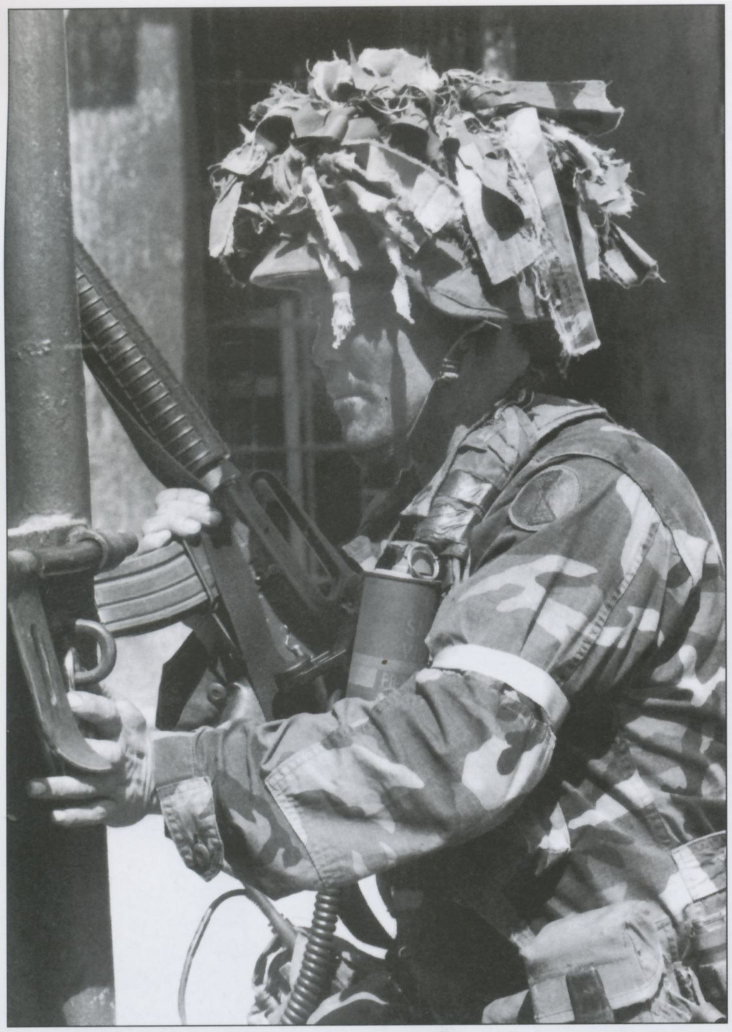
Delta's primary mission during JUST CAUSE was to follow leads that would result in the apprehension of General Noriega. There were countless reports and leads of his whereabouts and Delta Force teams checked out each.



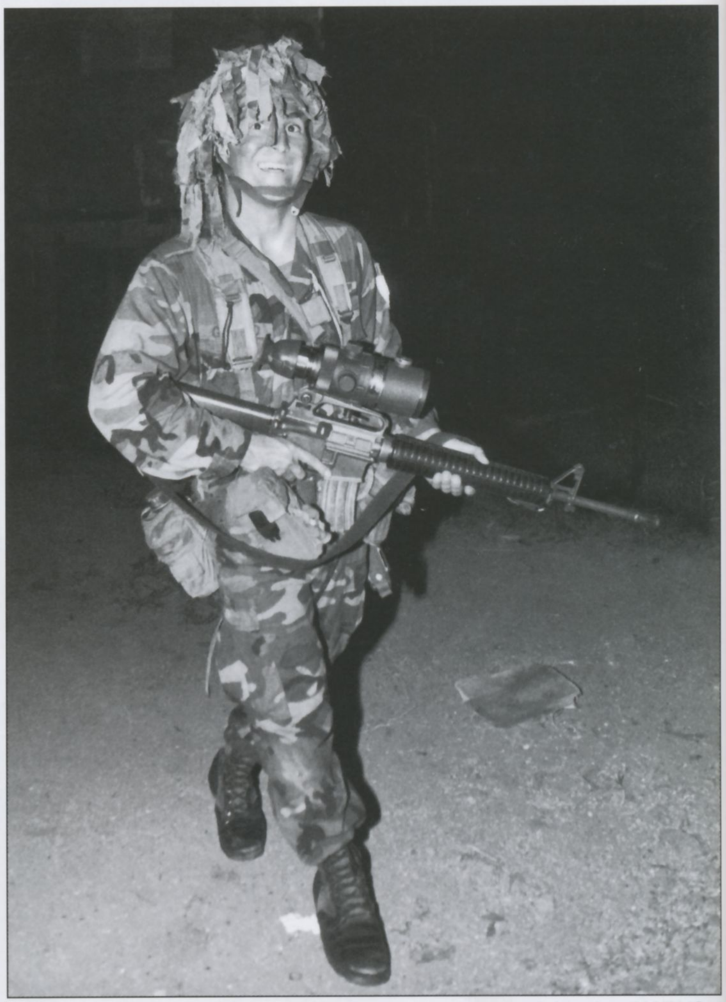
A grenadier pauses during a street patrol. Garbage collection had ceased and that was one of the first things the new government and the American civil affairs (military government) teams made a major effort to resume.

Besides curious civilians, photographers sometimes followed patrols, which proved to be a distraction to their ability to remain alert for threats.

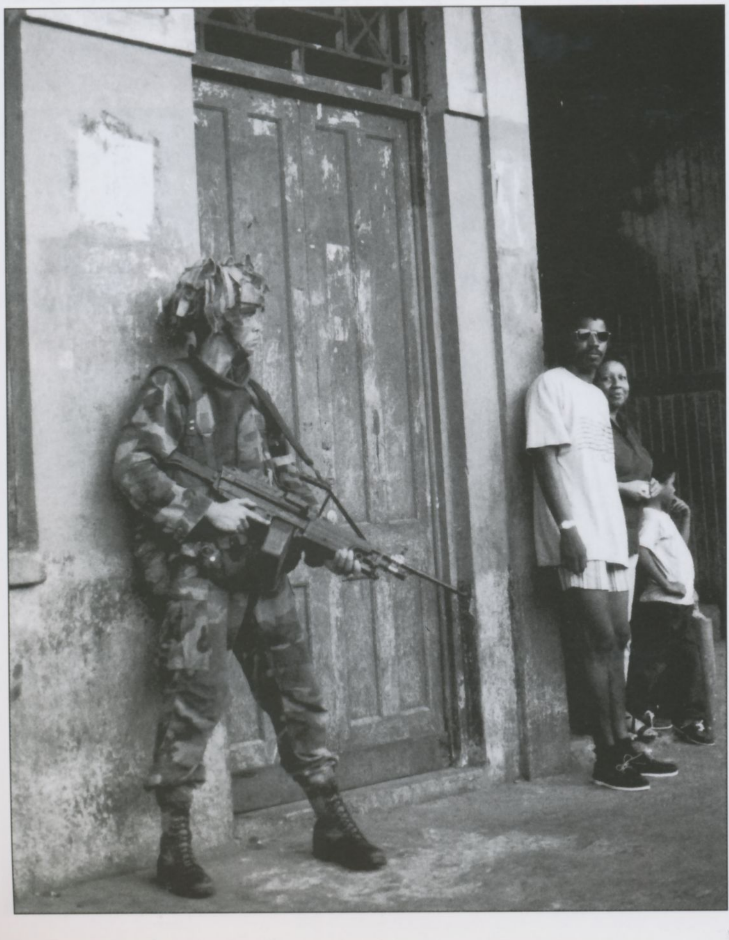
Soldiers learned to "read" the civilians they encountered. A lot could be told by their attitude and body language and even more if they had disappeared into their homes.



Above the M18 violet smoke grenade is a pouch for an SDU-5/E strobe light used to mark patrol locations at night to friendly aircraft. An infrared filter was placed over the strobe light lens making it only detectable by someone wearing night vision goggles. An AN/PRC-126 radio is attached to his belt.

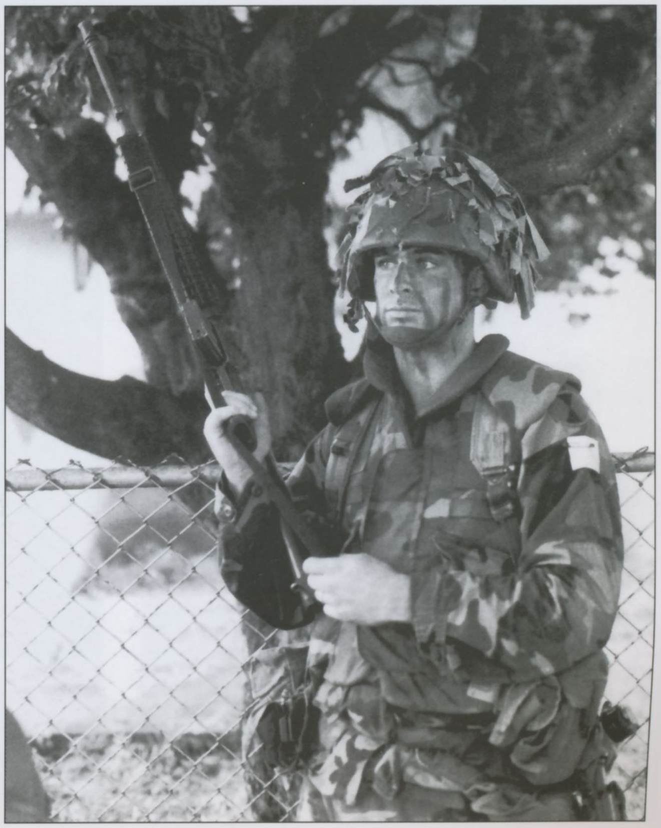


A cheery soldier has his photograph snapped at night. An AN/PVS-4 individual weapon night sight is mounted on his M16A2. This is an ambient light intensification device. Under moonlight, targets can be seen to about 550 meters. With starlight only they can be seen at about 370 meters. In a city, even with overcast skies, there is more than enough reflected light to use the sight.



A SAW gunner rests during a patrol. A rifle squad consisted of a staff sergeant squad leader and two four-man fire teams.

Jungle patrols were conducted through western and eastern Panama. There were drug traffickers working in the east near the Columbian border and the troops remained on high alert. There were virtually no contacts made by these units, but the extended patrolling proved to be good training experience. Note that the troops do not attempt to have alternating men hold their weapons to the right. It was found that that is an unnatural position for a right-handed shooter to carry a weapon and hampers rather than improves his reaction time.



The body armor vest, officially the "fragmentation protective vest, ground troops" was part of the "personal armor system for ground troops" (PASGT), which included the Kevlar helmet. The vest weighted 9 pounds.

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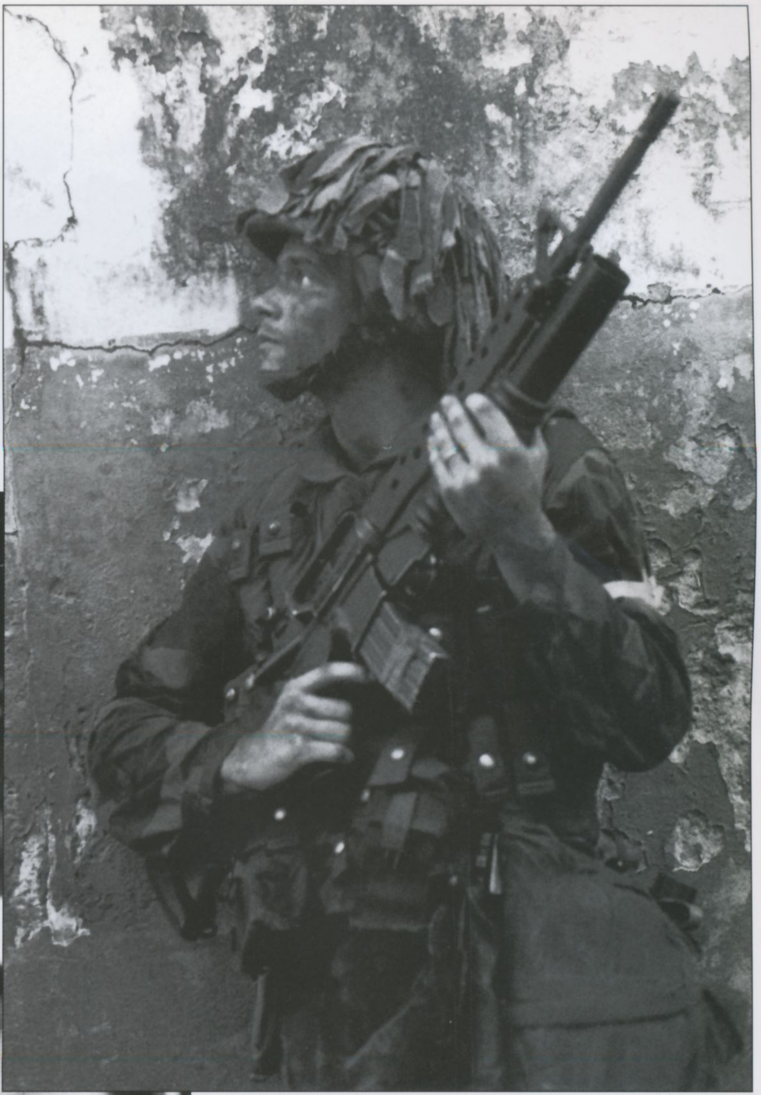
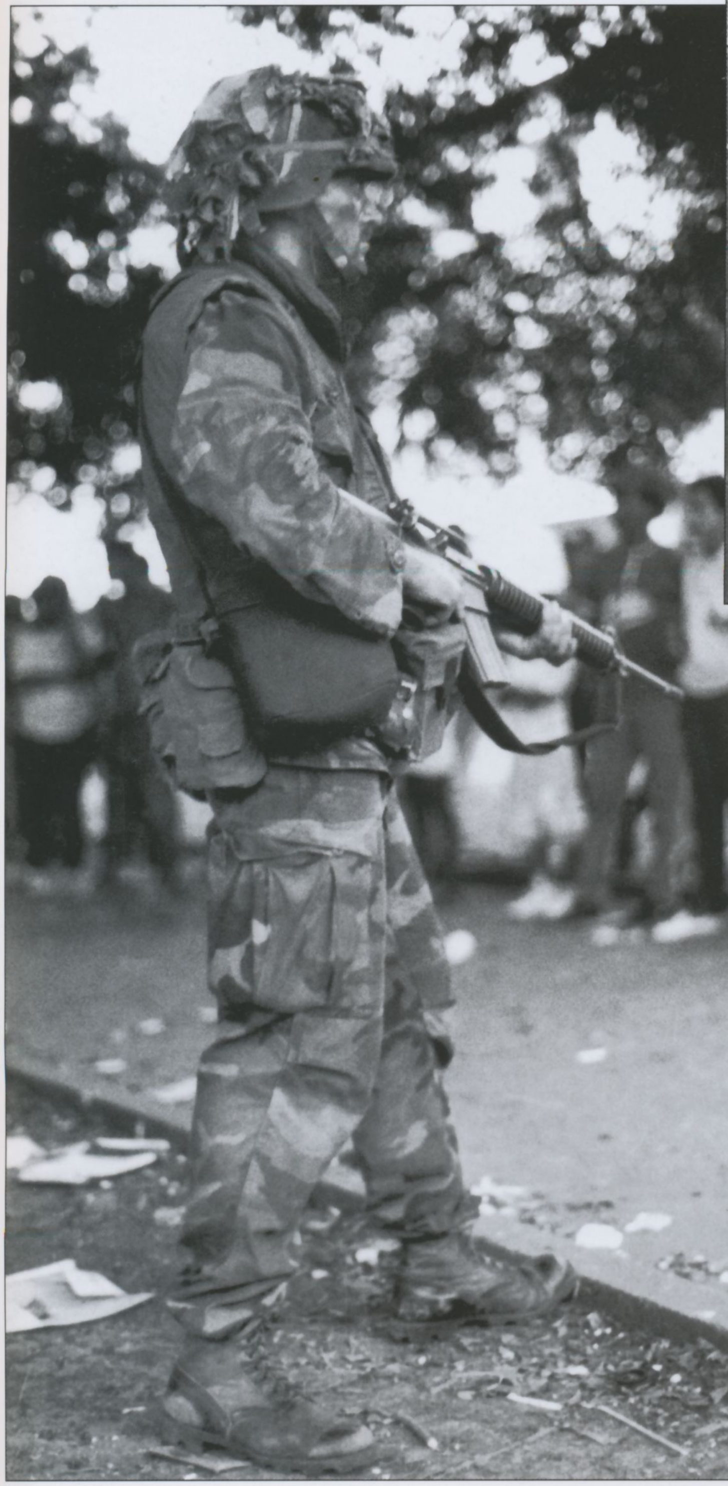
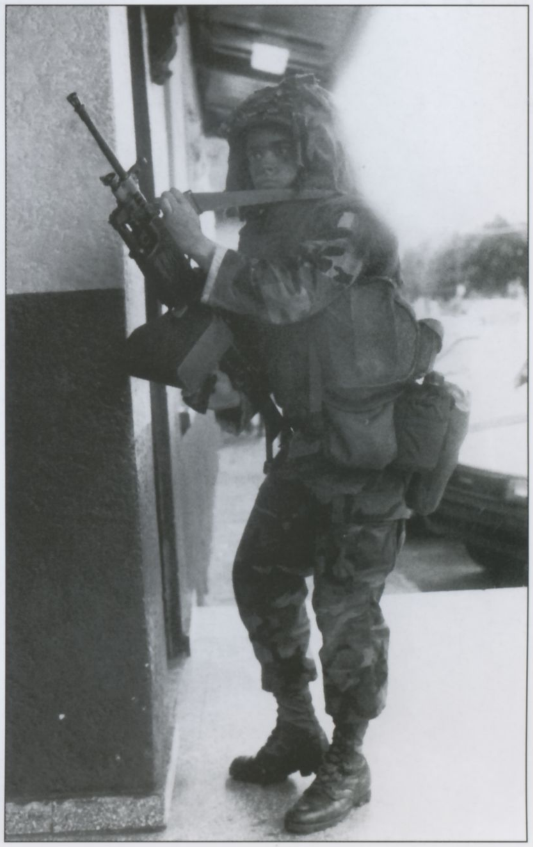
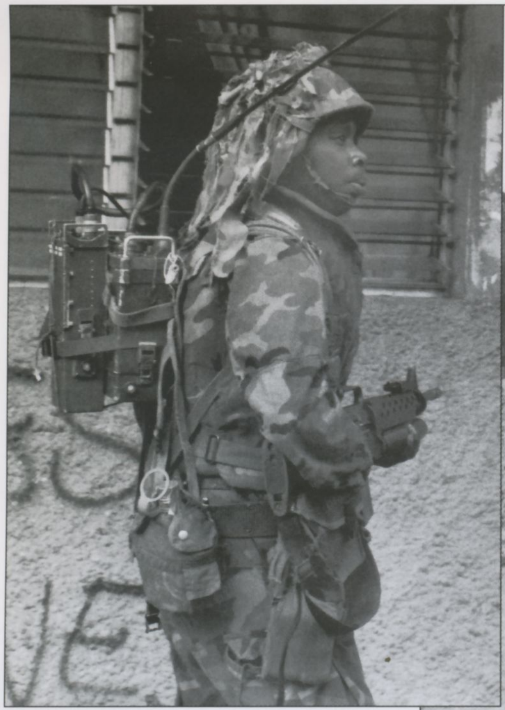
Street patrols quickly became routine and there was a danger of soldiers becoming bored and remaining less than alert. It was a constant battle with oneself to keep alert and the job of leaders to make sure men stayed on their toes. Each of a rifle squad's two fire team had a sergeant fire team leader, a SAW gunner (specialist), a grenadier (specialist), and a rifleman (private first class).

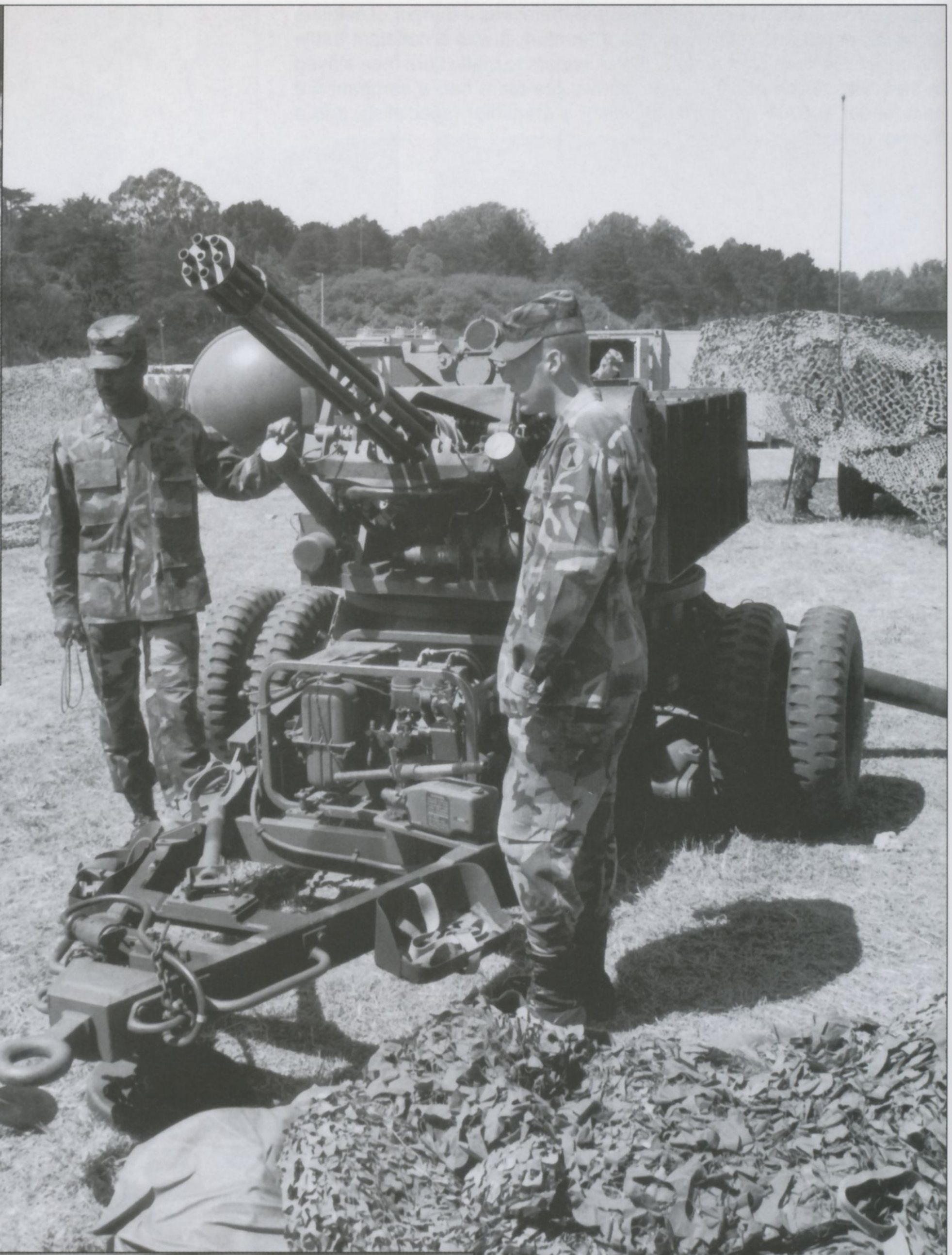








A platoon radio-telephone operator (RTO) carries an AN/PRC-119 Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System (SINCGARS). A KY-57 encryption device is fastened to the radio's back. SINCGARS radios operate using a frequency hopping system making interception impossible by all except the most sophisticated systems. They can also be operated in the normal single-channel mode.



There was little in the way of an air threat, but nonetheless units deployed with some antiaircraft weapons. The media often accused the Army of overreacting and deploying more force than was necessary, but no commander would risk exposing his troops to possible threats that he could not handle. It is far better to be safe than sorry. This is a 20mm Vulcan M167A1 air defense gun. It is basically the same M61 weapon used in jet fighters. Its six rotary barrels can fire 3,000 rounds per minute. Another reason they were deployed was that they could be employed against ground targets. A Vulcan could chew a building apart.

Troops of a reaction force load into a UH-60A Blackhawk helicopter in response to an alert. Distances were short in Panama and once a reaction force was airborne it could be on-station within minutes.

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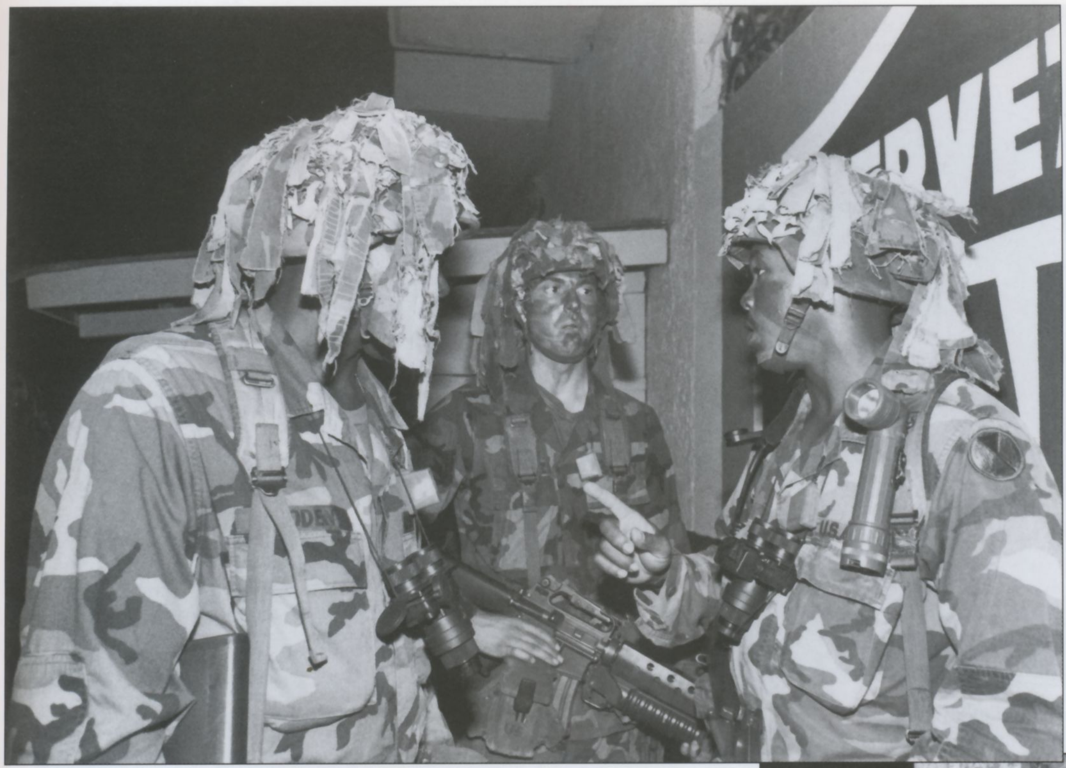
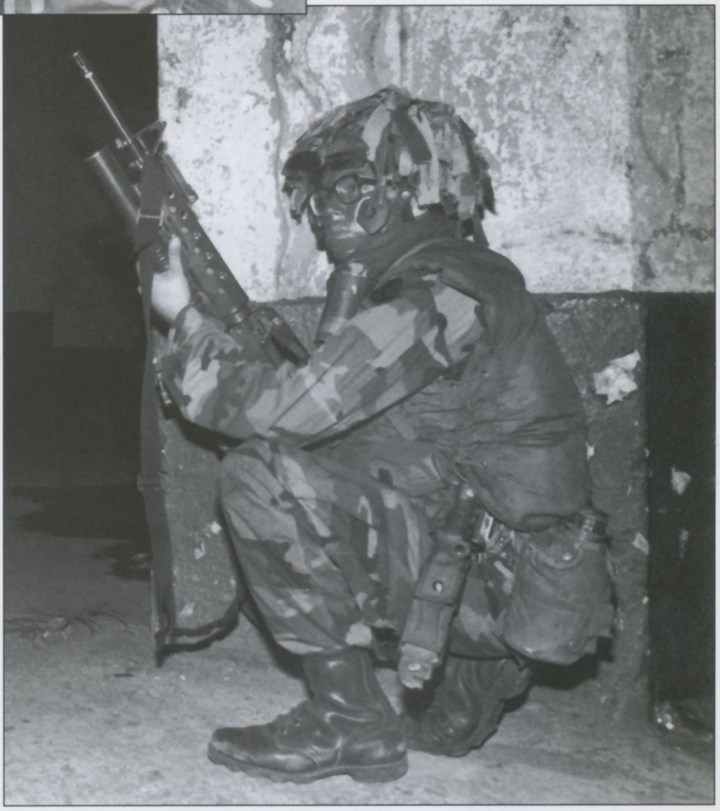
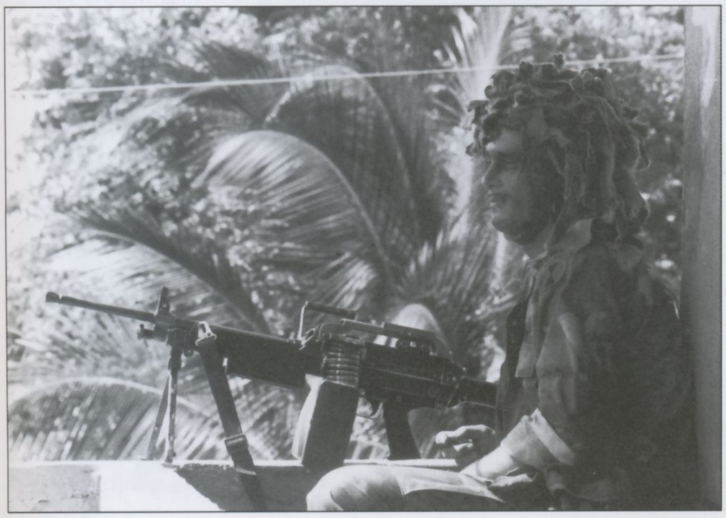


The 7th Infantry Division used Kevlar helmets with the standard woodlands camouflage cover, but with strips of battle dress uniform (BDU) camouflage fabric sewn to it to break-up the silhouette. This proved to be effective even in urban areas, not for its ability to blend into vegetation, but for simply distorting the helmet's distinctive outline. Light infantry units were widely issued night vision devices to give them a distinct advantage at night leading to the motto, "We own the night."

An MP of the 7th Military Police Company with his "scouts." Soldiers naturally cultivated friendship with the kids. A benefit was that children were curious and played in places adults did not bother going. They frequently reported the locations of abandoned or hidden weapons and the presence of strangers on "their turf."



This grenadier wears the head-mounting system for night vision goggles, but not the AN/PVS-7 goggles. The cheek support pads can be seen. On his belt can be seen the M9 multipurpose bayonet, which cannot be fitted on the rifle with an M203 mounted, but still serves as a utility knife. The bayonet coupled with the scabbard can also be used as a wire cutter. The snap pocket on the scabbard contains a sharpening stone. He wears the older M1969 body armor vest with an olive dab cover.



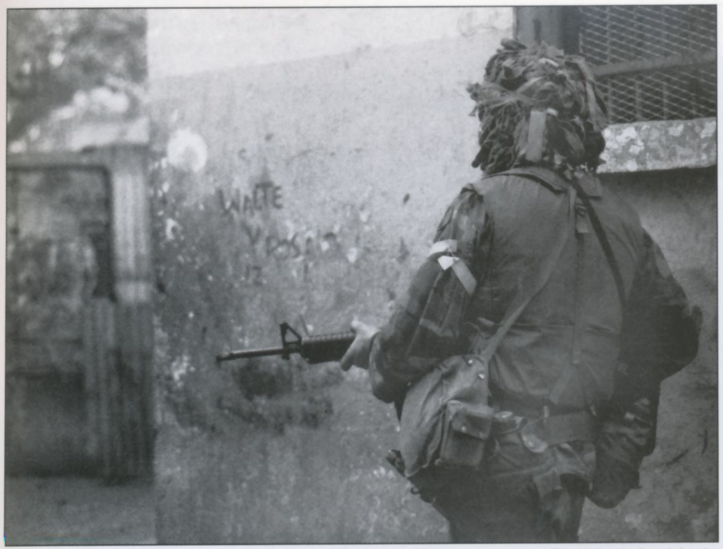
The M249 SAW was developed from the Belgium-designed Minimi light machine gun and was adopted in 1982. A plastic magazine box with a 200-round belt was standard, but a 30-round M16A2 magazine could also be used. SAW gunners often carried an ammunition pouch with three such magazines. This also gave them the capability to use magazines from their squad's riflemen.

The SAW's 200-round magazine was heavy and SAW gunners often used a short length of belt, perhaps 50 rounds, when patrolling. The belt was of the metallic-link disintegrating type. When belt-firing the rate of fire was 725 rounds per minute, but with an M16A2 magazine it rose to 1,000 rounds per minute.

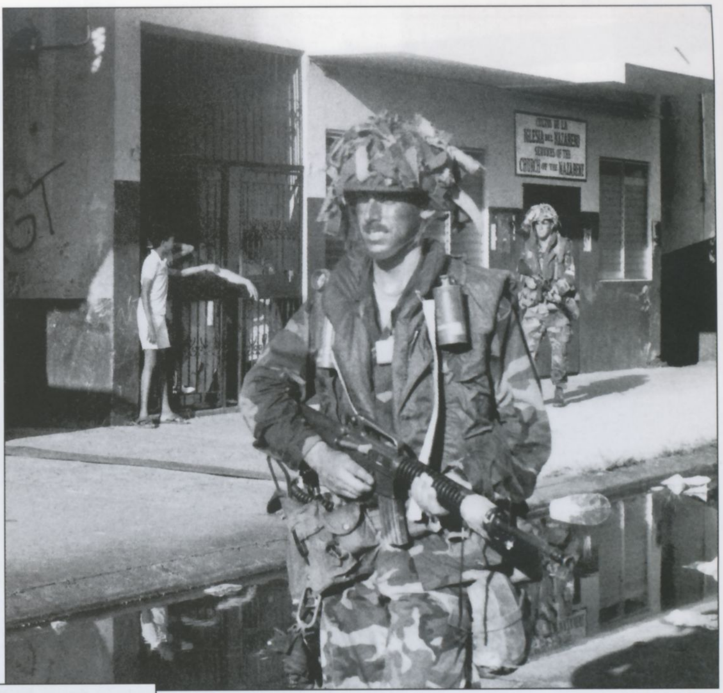
Troops on street patrol. The length of the camouflage stripes attached to helmets varied. If they were too long they moved too much and might attract unwanted attention.

Soldiers pose for a photograph before a PDF mural depicting its history. Noriega's face can be seen beside the clenched fist.

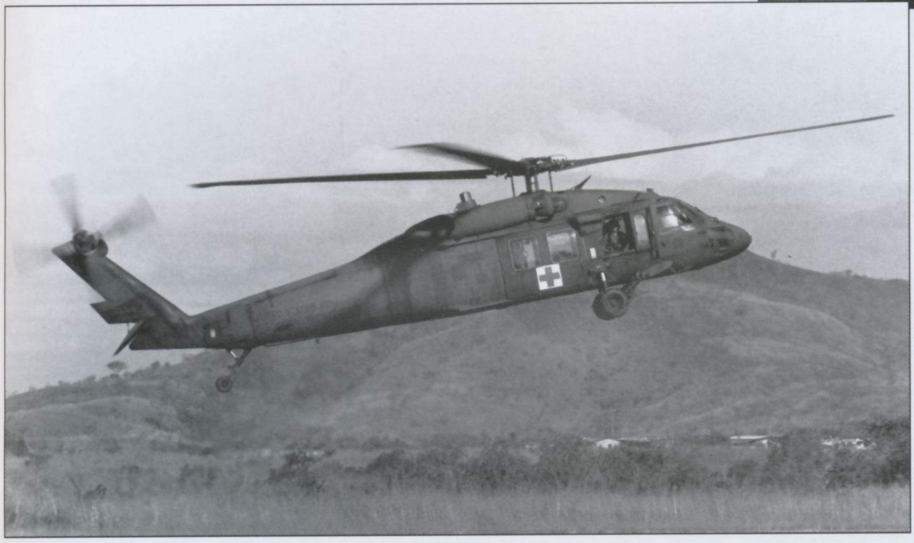
Riflemen and grenadiers carried two rifle magazine pouches, each holding three 30-round magazines—210 rounds including the seventh magazine in the M16A2 rifle.



An infantryman cautiously approaches a building corner. On his left side is the carrier for the M17A2 protective mask intended for nuclear, chemical, and biological (NBC) warfare. "Gas masks'" were carried in the event that tear gas was employed.

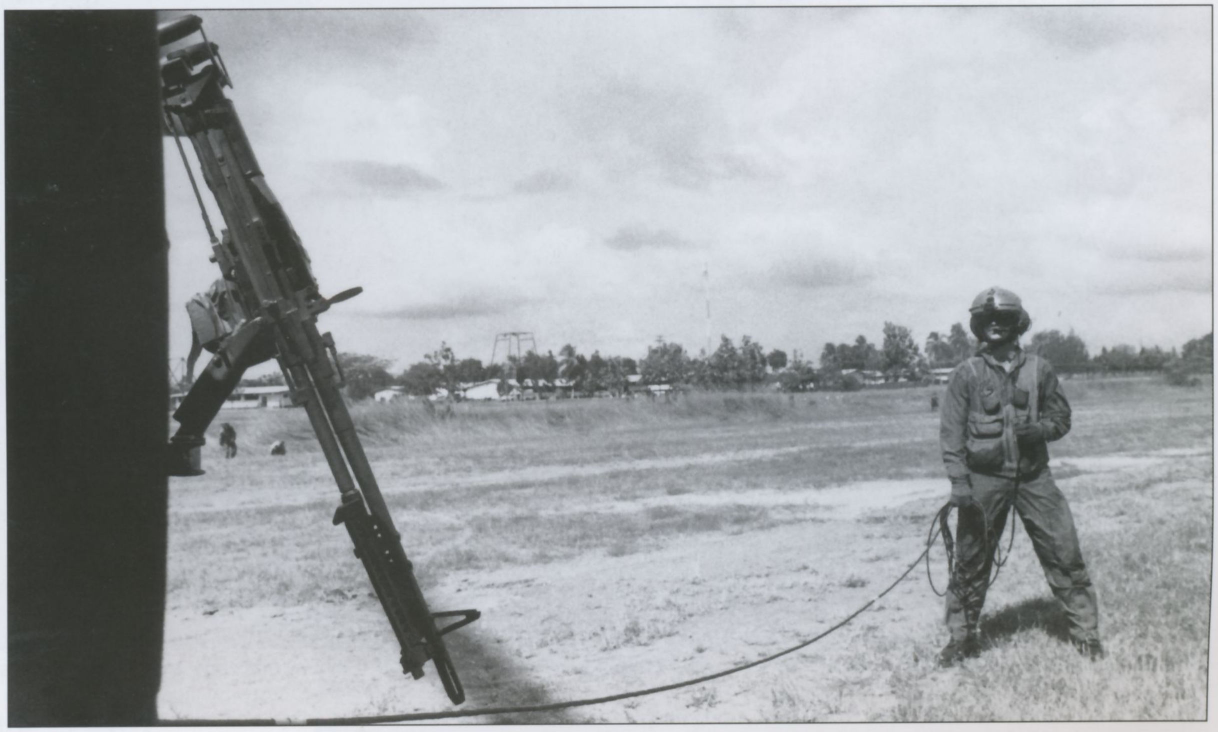


This 7th Infantry Division infantryman has taped a mini-flashlight beneath the forearm of his M16A2 rifle for clearing buildings night or day. On his right hip he carries an AN/PRC-126 radio. These were carried by the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and the three squad leaders of a rifle platoon allowing all to intercommunicate on the same net. Each platoon within a company is on a different frequency—the platoon net.

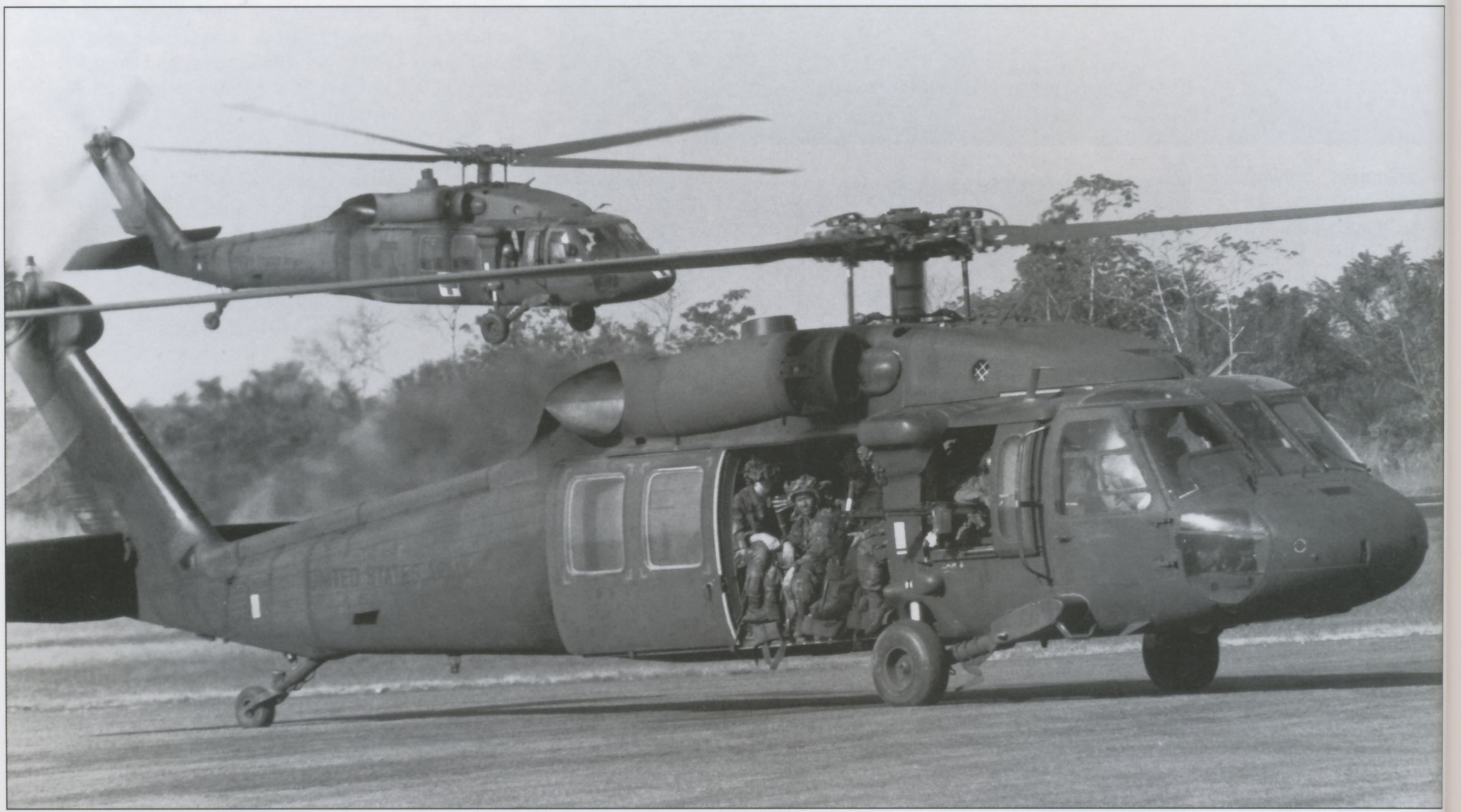


A UH-60A Blackhawk medical evacuation helicopter takes off. These were operated by the 214th Medical Detachment (Air Ambulance). A Blackhawk medevac chopper can transport six litter patients or seven ambulatory (seated) patients. The red on white Geneva cross is marked on the sides, nose, and belly. The can-like device to the aft of the main rotor is an AN/ALQ-144A infrared jammer to hamper infrared-guided missiles.

A helicopter crewman stands along side a UH-60A, a position from which he directs passengers to board and ensure they stay clear of the tail rotor. He remains linked to the intercom system with a cable reeled from a side receptacle. He wears an SPH-4 flight helmet, CWU-27/P flyer's coveralls, SRU-21/P survival vest, and GS/FRP-2 flyer's gloves. A 7.62mm M60D machine gun is mounted in the door. While lacking a shoulder stock, being replaced by spade grips and a butterfly trigger system, it retains the bipod allowing it to be dismounted for somewhat awkward ground firing if necessary.



7th Infantry Division troops board a Blackhawk in preparation for an aerial patrol. Troops are required to have their sleeves rolled down to reduce burn injuries, radio antennas removed, their weapons cleared, and when seated the weapons are held muzzle down to clause less damage in the event of an accidental discharge.



A UH-60A troop carrier awaits its turn to takeoff while a medevac bird launches. The only nationality markings on Army helicopters is UNITED STATES ARMY in small black letters on the tailboom for low visibility. Helicopters are not painted in camouflage patterns because from above, to a searching enemy aircraft, the rapidly moving rotary blades over the mottled camouflage pattern would create a flickering affect and attract attention.

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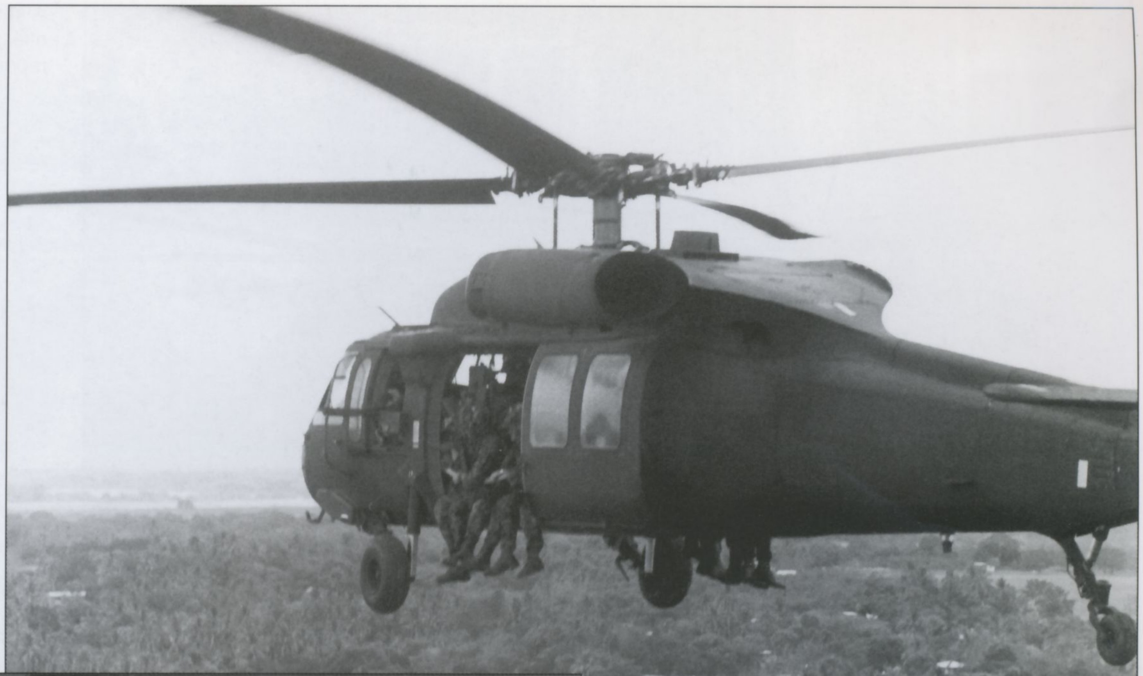
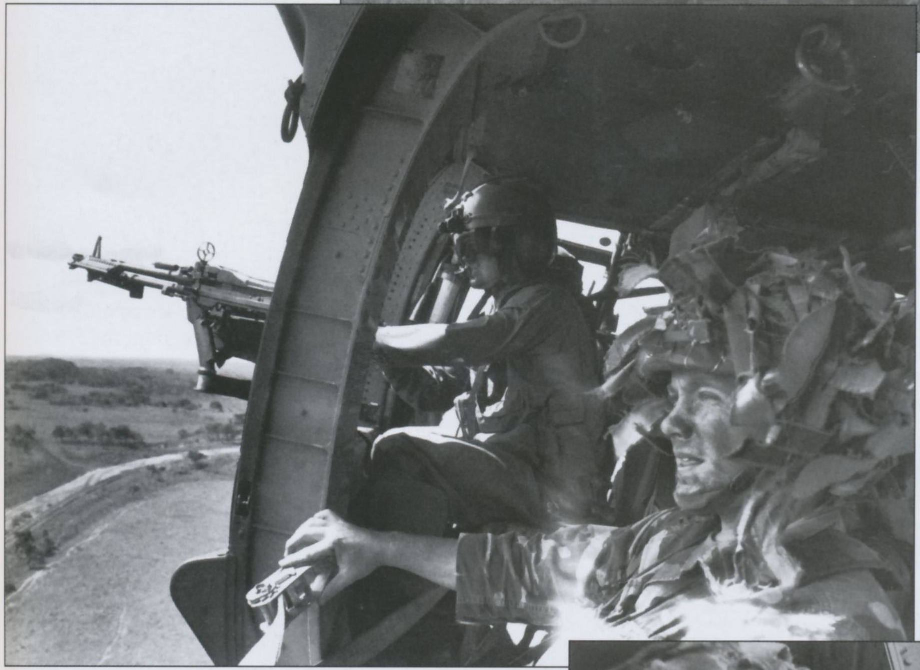
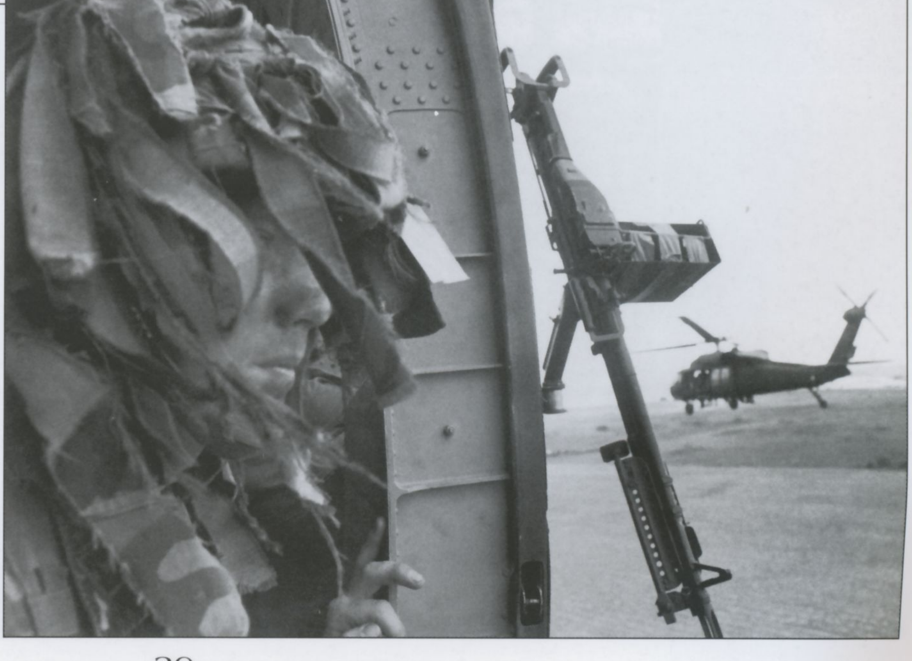
En route in response to a report of suspicious activity. The troop seats were usually removed for assault operations and the troops simply sat on the troop compartment floor. This made it easier and faster to board and offload, and provided more space for the bulky rucksacks. For the troops sitting in the door there is a single long cargo strap that is passed over their laps to secure them inside.





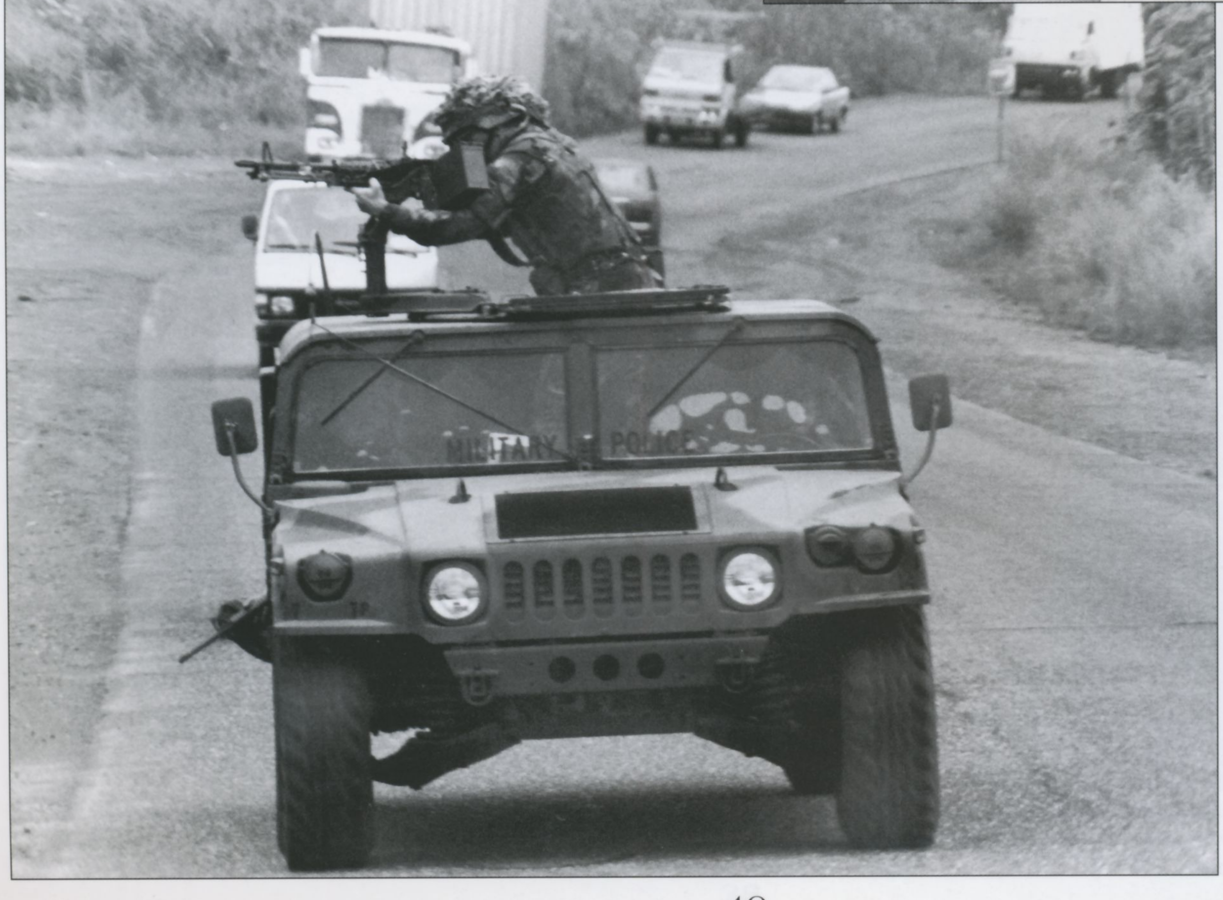
The cargo strap used as a troop "seat belt" can be seen here. When on the final approach the man sitting forward in the side door unsnaps the fastening device and hands it to the next man. Each man in turn has to grip it firmly from the man passing it on to ensure that it is not lost. If let go of the heavy fastener and belt whipping about would cause serious injuries.



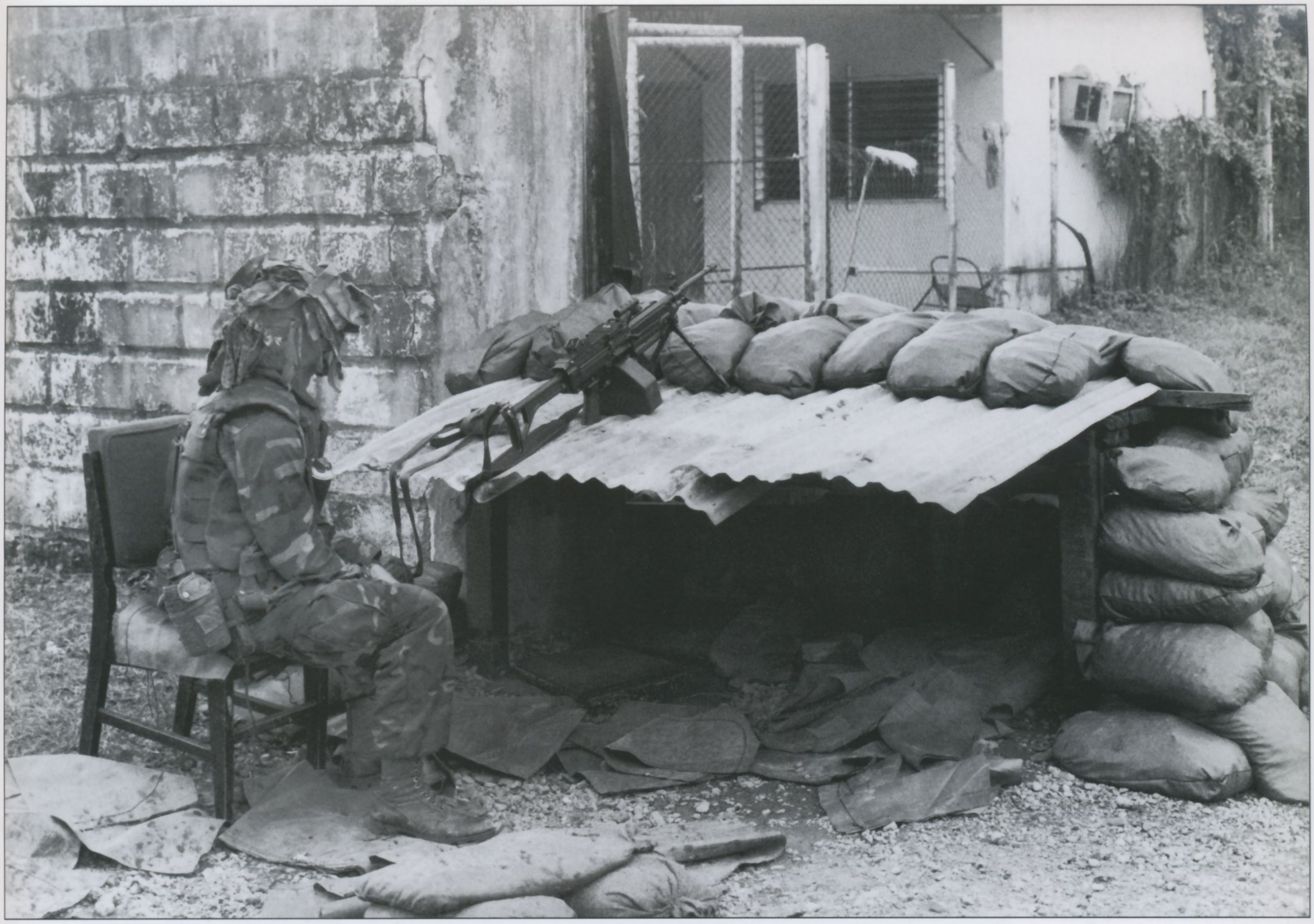
The 200-round ammunition box on this M60D machine gun is taped over to keep the wind from whipping the ammunition belt out of the box.

A serial of Blackhawks assault lands a rifle platoon to search an area that a report alerted them to.

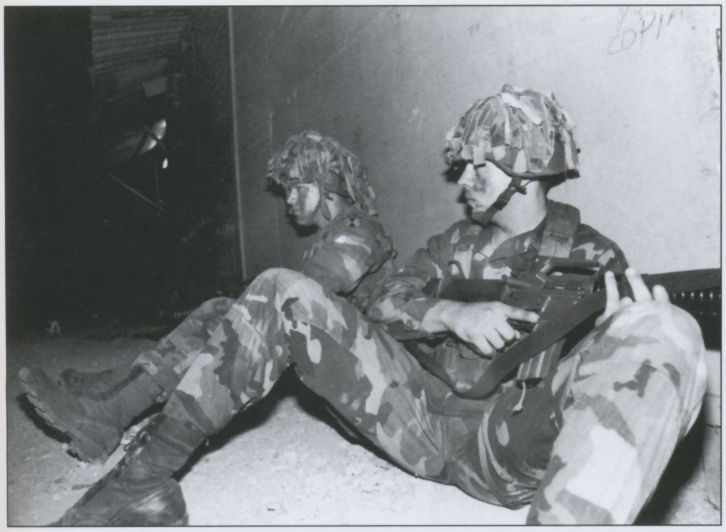
A platoon radio-telephone operator makes a communications check on an AN/PRC-119 radio prior to commencing a patrol. The RTO accompanied the platoon leader and the radio was on the company command net allowing the platoon to talk to the other two rifle platoons, the company commander, and the executive officer.



A military police HMMWV M1025 armament carrier conducting a highway patrol. This one mounts an M60 machine gun, but a 40mm Mk 19 Mod 3 automatic grenade launcher or a .50-cal. M2 machine gun or an M249 SAW could be mounted. MILITARY POLICE is marked on the windshield with black stick-on letters. The cord angling across the windshield holds the radio antenna down to prevent it being damaged by tree limbs, overpasses, telephone, and power lines.



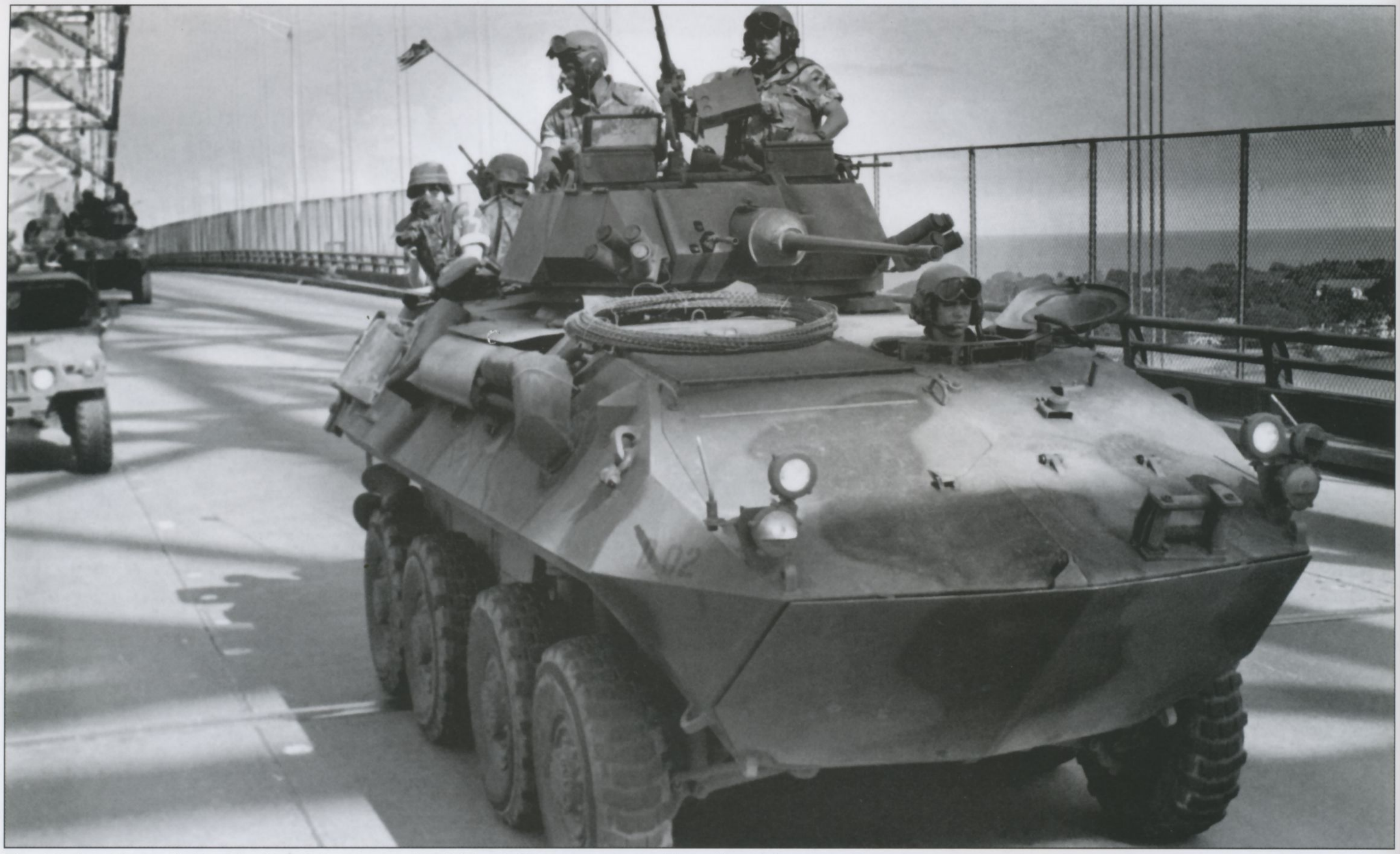
Lookout posts were established on streets and alleys leading to US military installations to prevent attempts by renegades from moving in close for harassing attacks. Here a SAW gunner mans such an outpost constructed of sandbags and scrounged sheet metal. This provided a rain shelter…or sorts.



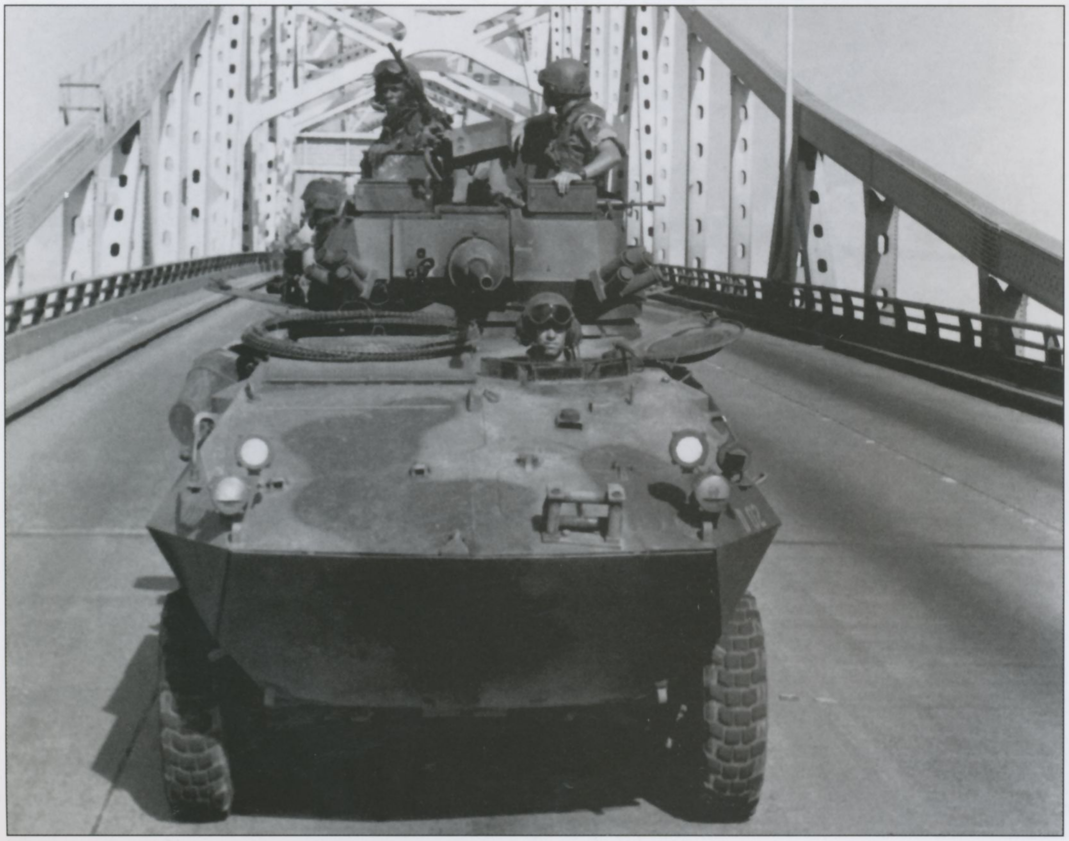
A street patrol takes a rest break, but remains alert. Other men are posted further down the street in both directions as well as across it. The subdued 7th Infantry Division shoulder sleeve insignia, its official designation, or simply "patch," is worn on the left shoulder 1/2-inch below the shoulder seam. The subdued patch had a black "hourglass" on an olive drab backing. The full-color version was black on a red backing.

General Carl E. Vouno, the Army Chief of Staff, conducts a tour of confiscated weapons along with the commander of the 197th Infantry Brigade (Light) (Separate). Even a replica Colt .45-cal. Buntline Special was confiscated, probably from Noregia's personal collection, who had a taste for the unusual and exotic.

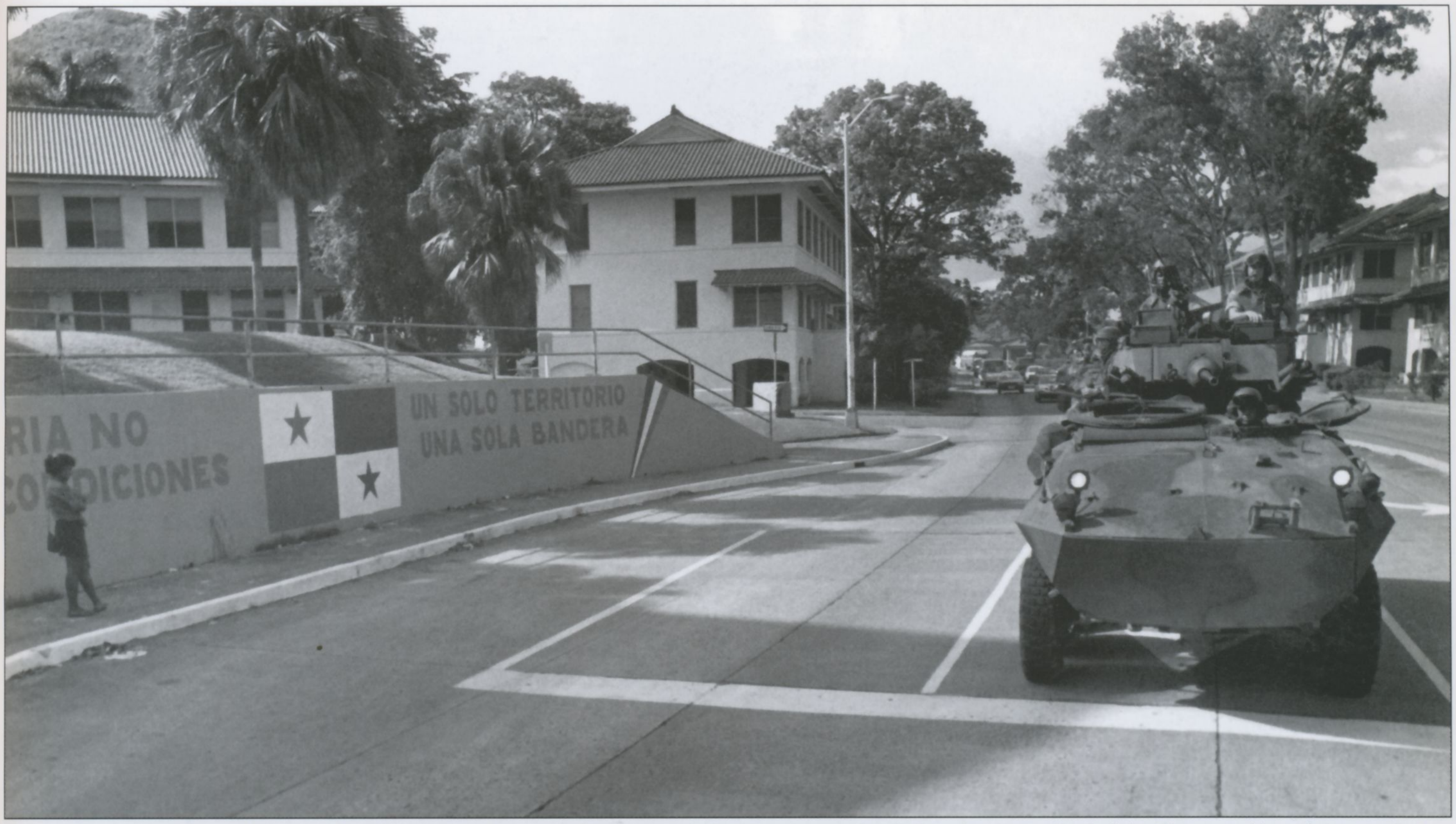
Marine Corps Light Armored Vehicles



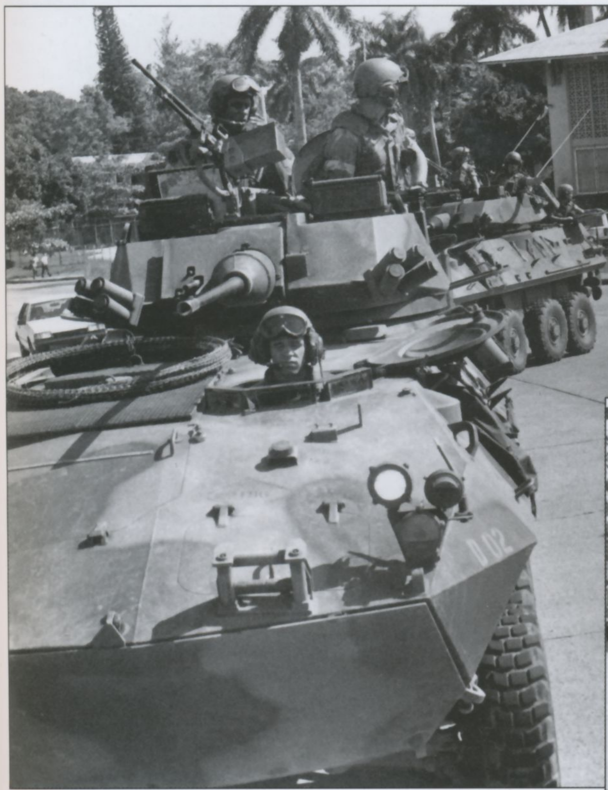
The Marine Corps fielded its first light armored vehicle (LAV—pronounced "lave") unit in 1985. Panama was the LAV's first use in combat. The LAV-25 is the basic vehicle weighing in at 29 tons. It has eight wheels of which the rear four are powered, but the forward four can be powered too. It is manned by a crew of three, commander and gunner in the turret and the driver. Company D (Reinforced), 2d Light Armored Infantry Battalion from the 2d Marine Division at Camp Lejeune, NC was deployed in May 1989. Some form of armored fighting vehicle was needed for show of force demonstrations during right of passage exercises. There were no US armored vehicles in Panama prior to that. Here a LAV patrol crosses the Bridge of the Americas on the Pan-American Highway spanning the Panama Canal linking North and South America.



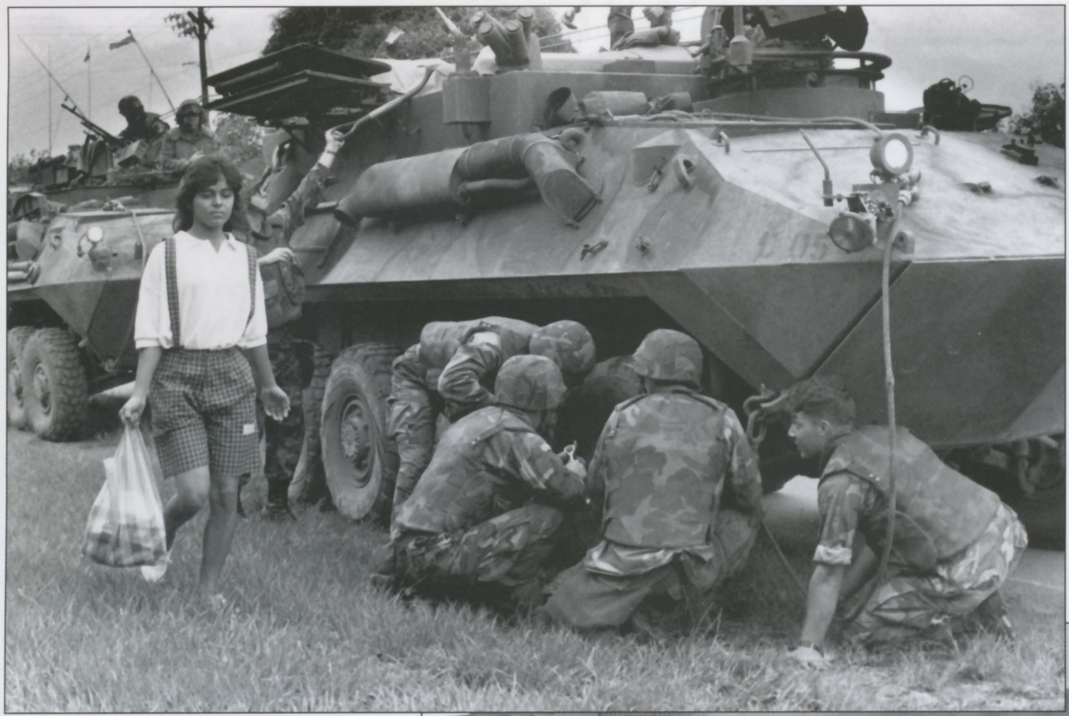
The LAV-25 mounts a 25mm, hence its designation, M242 Bushmaster chain gun, a coaxial M240C machine gun, a turret top M240 machine gun, and two four-tube M243 smoke grenade dischargers. A total of 420 rounds of 25mm armor-piercing discarding sabot-tracer and high-explosive incendiary-tracer are carried. Armor protection is only sufficient for small arms fire and shell fragments.



One of the reasons that LAVs were found desirable for use in Panama was that they were wheeled and comparatively light. They would not be prone to tear up paving and curbs. It would win no friends if heavier full-tracked armored vehicles were used damaging the country's streets, roads, and bridges. It may not be an impressive vehicle compared to heavy tanks, but for a show of force in a Third World country it did the job. When patrolling on public streets all local traffic regulations were complied with to prevent accidents and this won friends.

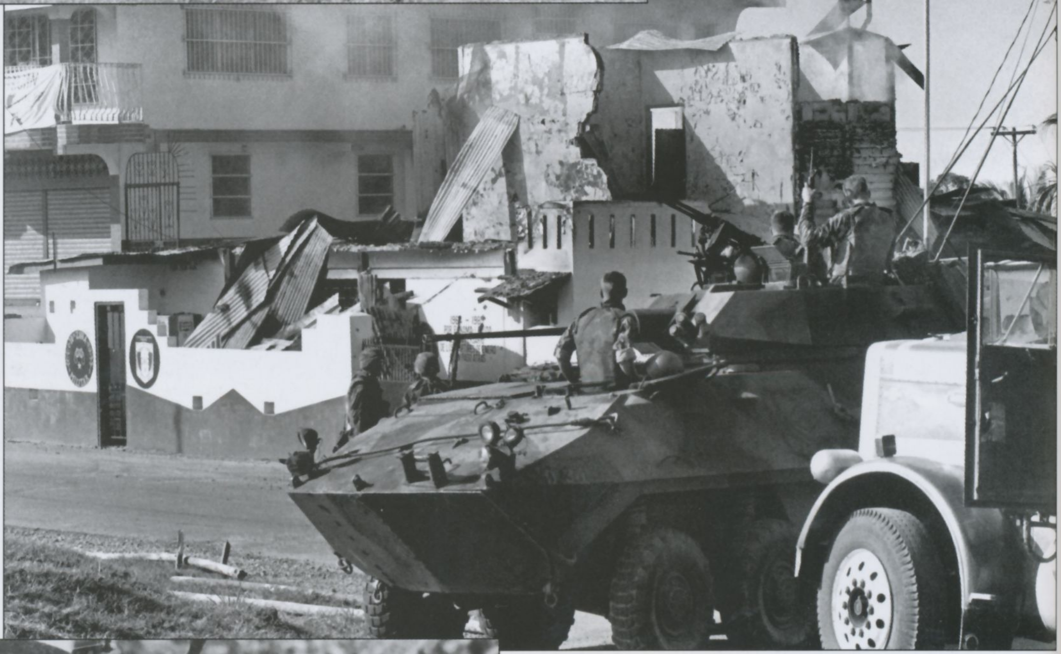


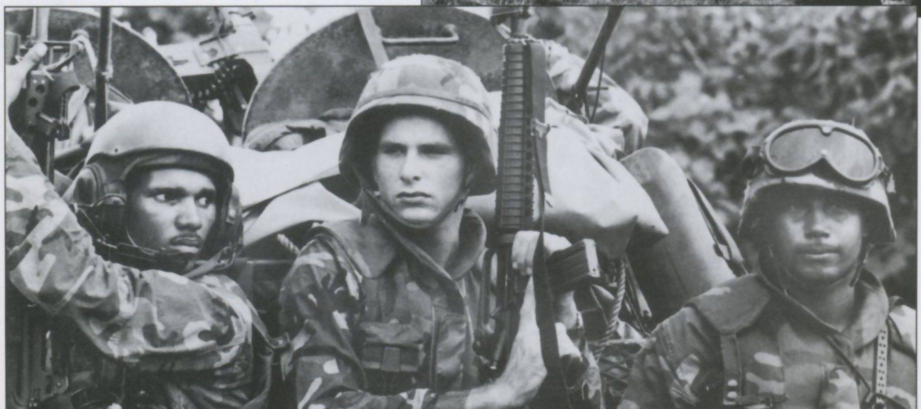
On the sides of the hull nose forward of the front tires was the company letter followed by a two-digit vehicle number, here B 02 in black. LAV numbers in the company headquarters began with "0" and LAVs in platoons began with the platoon number (1-3). The crew wears olive drab DH132 combat vehicle crewman's (CVC) helmet, the same as worn by Army armored vehicle crews. It had integral earphones and voice-activated microphone linked to the intercom and radio.



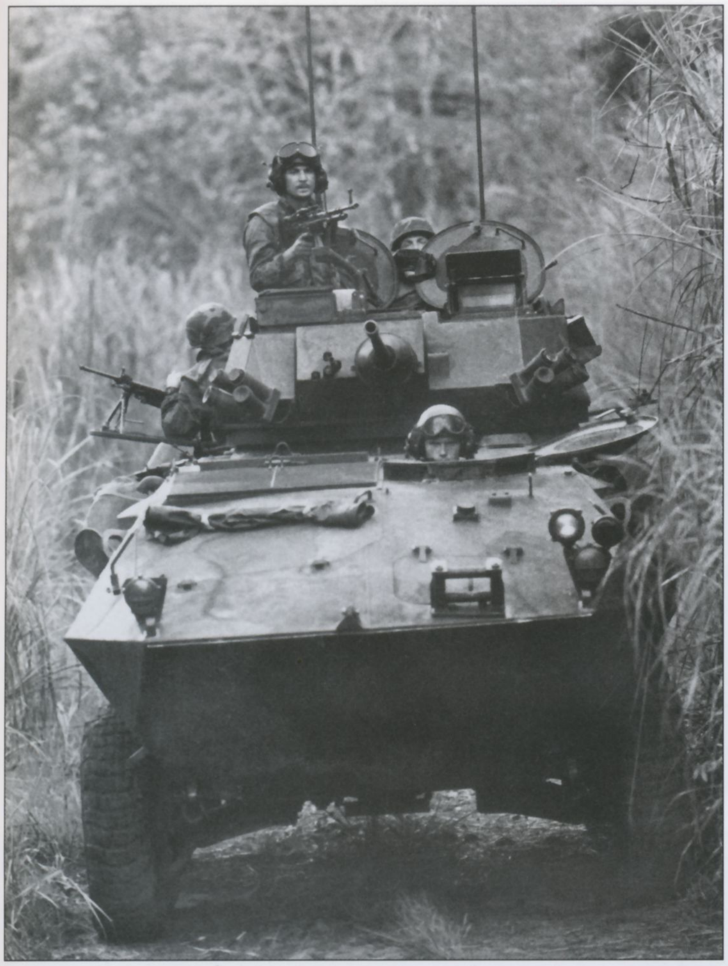
The crew of one of the two LAV logistics variants (LAV-L), D 05, deployed to Panama is having its tire changed. Some of the marines take the time to checkout the passing scenery. Company D also deployed with 14 LAV-25s and a single LAV command and control variant (LAV-C2). The LAV-L had a large top deck cargo hatch with a removable crane. Cargo could also be loaded or unloaded through the rear hatch. They were mainly used to keep the unit supplied with ammunition, but would also deliver rations and water. It was provided an M240 machine gun mounted at the commander's hatch, of which the ammunition box can just be seen, and it was fitted with two four-tube smoke grenade dischargers.

LAV-25 D 36 (the marking is in green here since the backing camouflage pattern splotch is black) pass the blasted headquarters of 2° Zona Militar (2d Military Zone) at La Chorrera 25 kilometers east of the Panama Canal. The company took the facility the second day of the operation losing one man. The insignia to the left of the door is that of 2° Zona Militar. The country was divided into 12 such districts for military administration. To the right side of the door is the PDF insignia. Note that the vehicle commander is holding an M16A2 rifle for use against snipers.

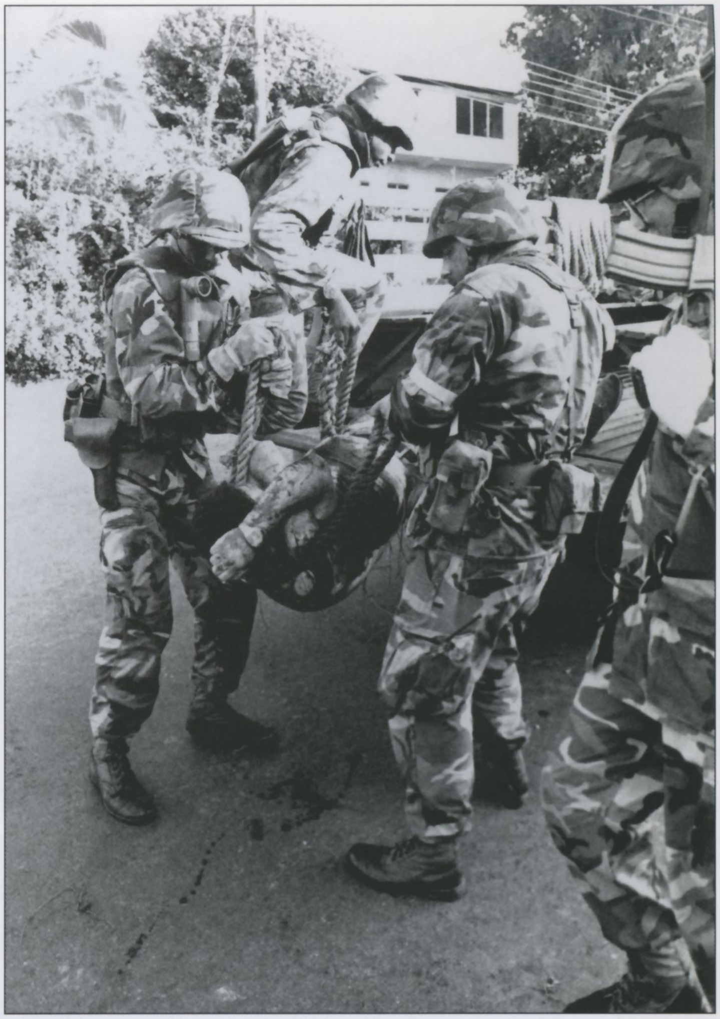




Besides the three-man crew the LAV-25 carried a four-man dismountable scout team which could be used for local security around the vehicle, to clear buildings and suspected areas, reconnoiter routes and designated areas, and engage targets from the two aft hull hatches while mounted. The scout team leader wore a CVC helmet in order to tap into the vehicle crew's intercom. Note that the scouts carry canteens and ammunition pouches attached to their body armor vests as they did not wear standard web gear so as to be less encumbered for moving about inside the LAV. The man to the right carries a 9mm M9 pistol in an M11 shoulder holster. The bracket below the center man's rifle butt can be fitted with an M240 machine gun pedestal mount, but this was not used.

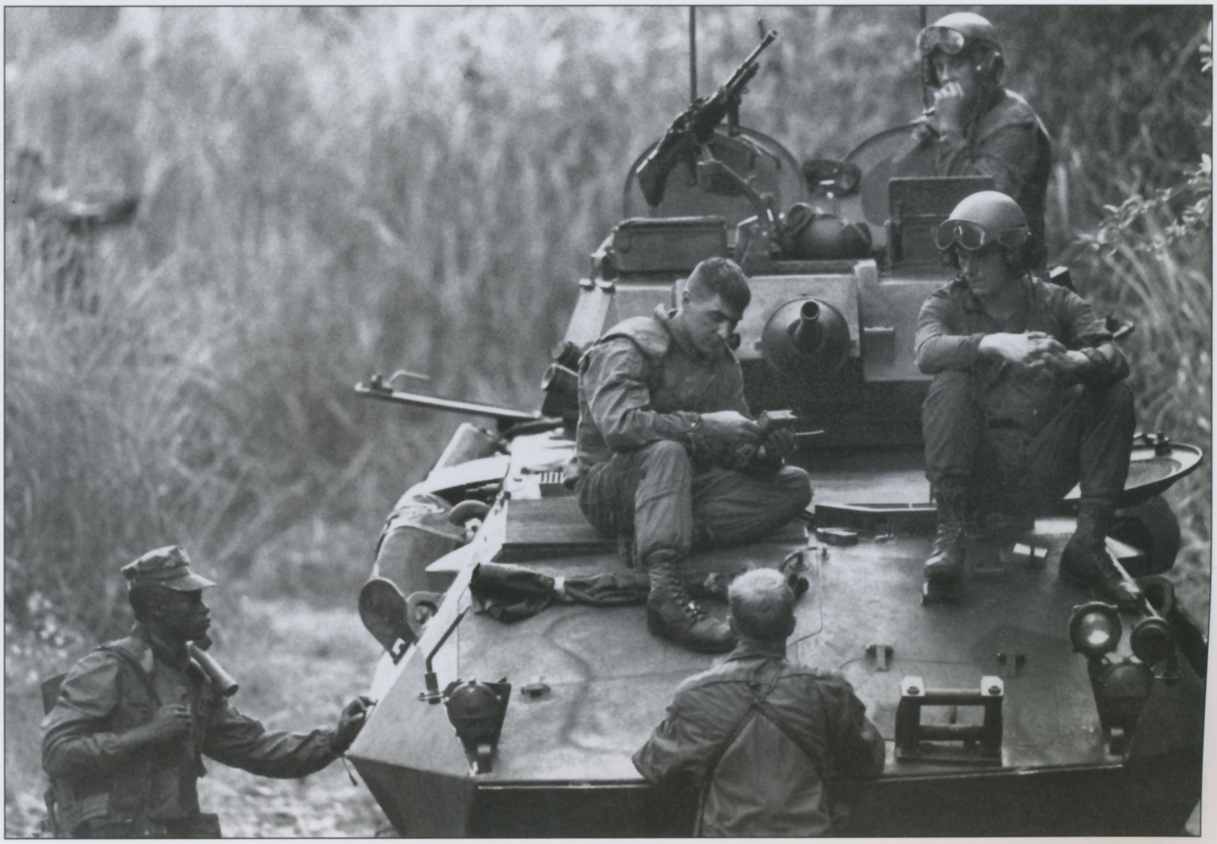


LAVs were also employed for jungle patrols enabling patrols to cover a great deal of ground. Fortunately the wet season was past or the LAVs would have had difficulties in this environment. Wheeled armored vehicles operating off-road in extremely muddy conditions easily become mired. It was too easy for them to "belly out" with the vehicle's hull bottom resting on the mud surface and the wheels buried.

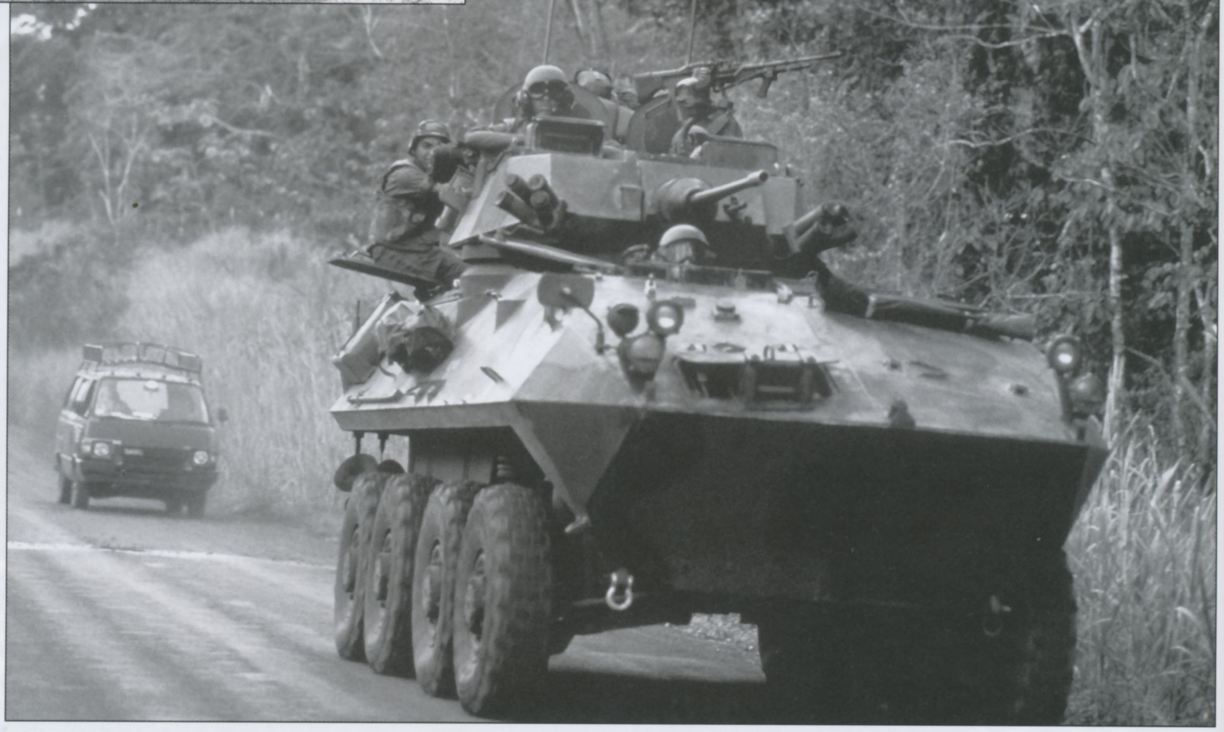


Marines remove the body of a PDF soldier from a truck who attempted to run a roadblock during the fighting. The man to the left is armed with a .45cal. Colt M1911A1 pistol in an M1 leather holster. Even though being replaced by the 9mm Beretta M9, the Colt automatic was still in use.

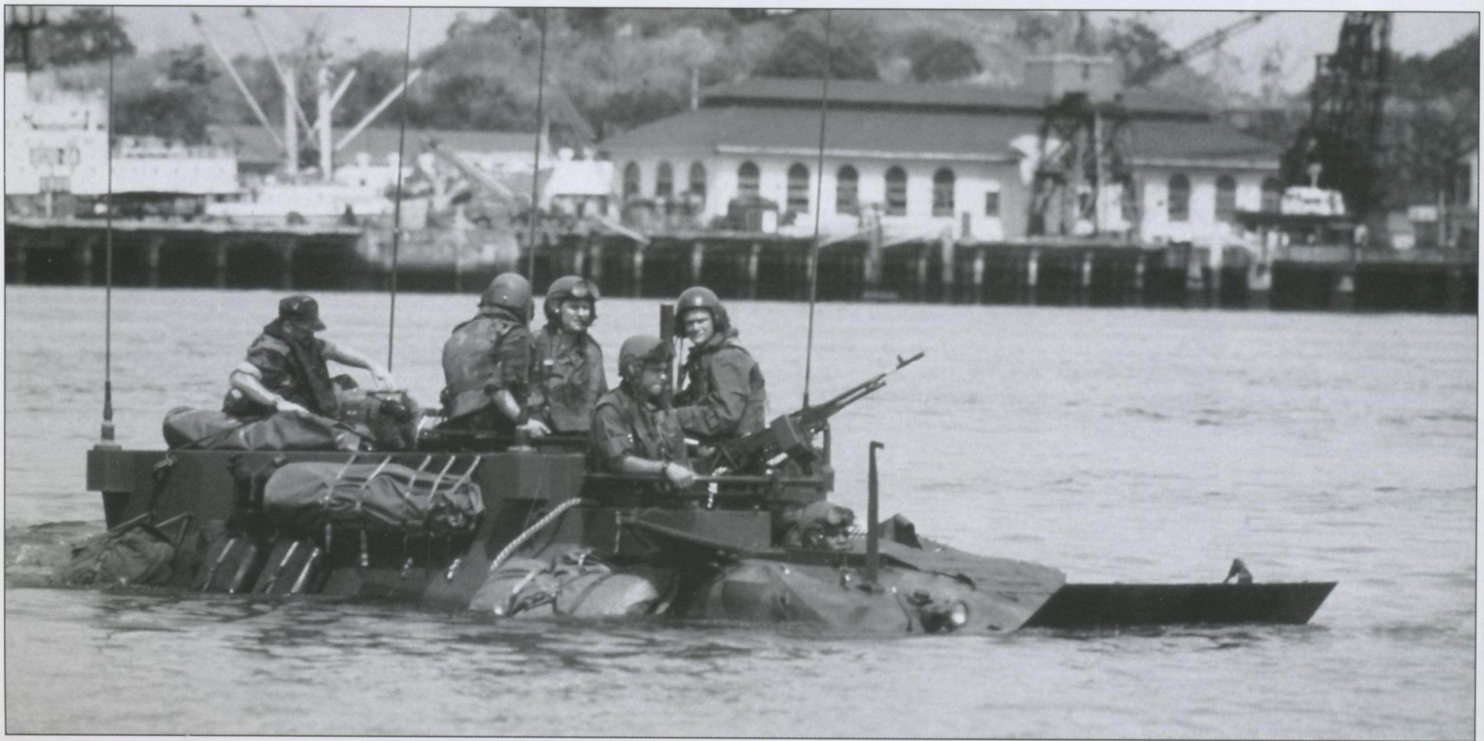
As an alternate to the M240 machine gun mounted atop the turret an M60E3 was sometimes used. This was a lighter weight version of the standard M60 weighing 18.5 pounds as opposed to 23 pounds. The quick-change barrel was separate from the gas cylinder, they were a single unit on the M60; it had a forward pistol grip, and was an inch shorter owing to the shortened flash suppressor.



Marines toss meals, ready-to-eat (MRE) rations to Panamanian children. The crew compartment of the LAV was provided with two vision ports on both sides and in the rear hatches, but there were no weapon firing ports. To fire their weapons from the vehicle the scout team had to expose themselves from the two top deck hatches.

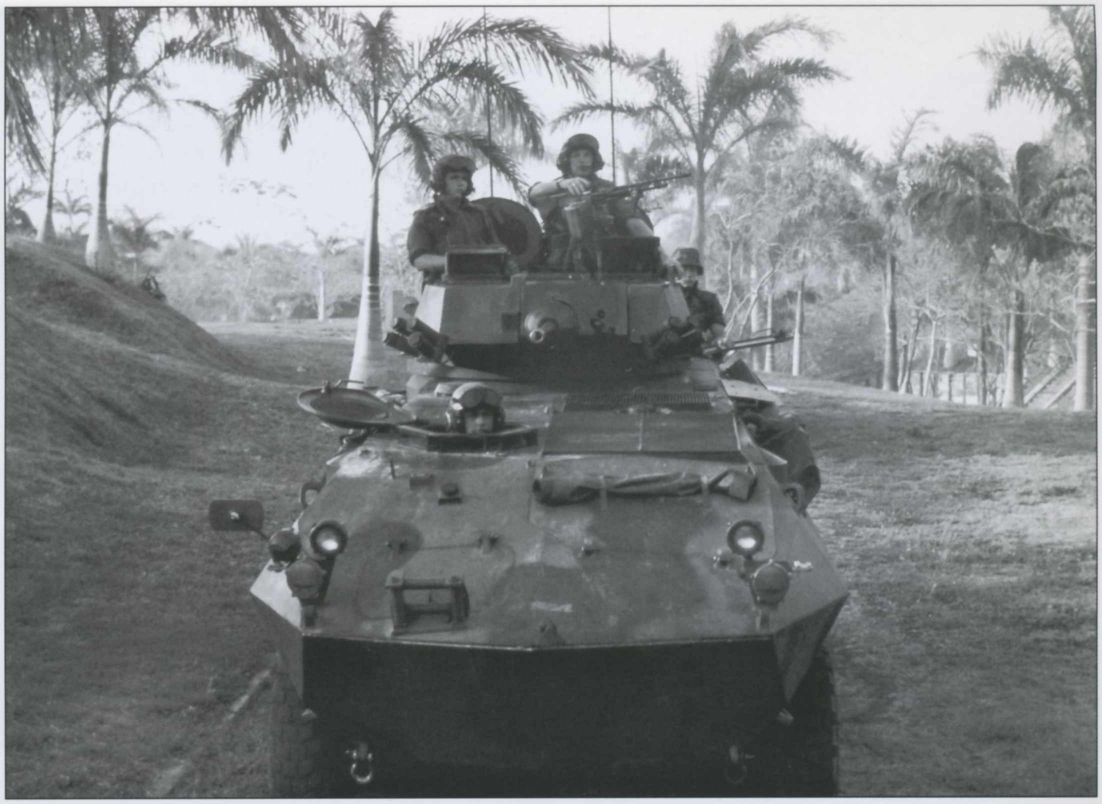


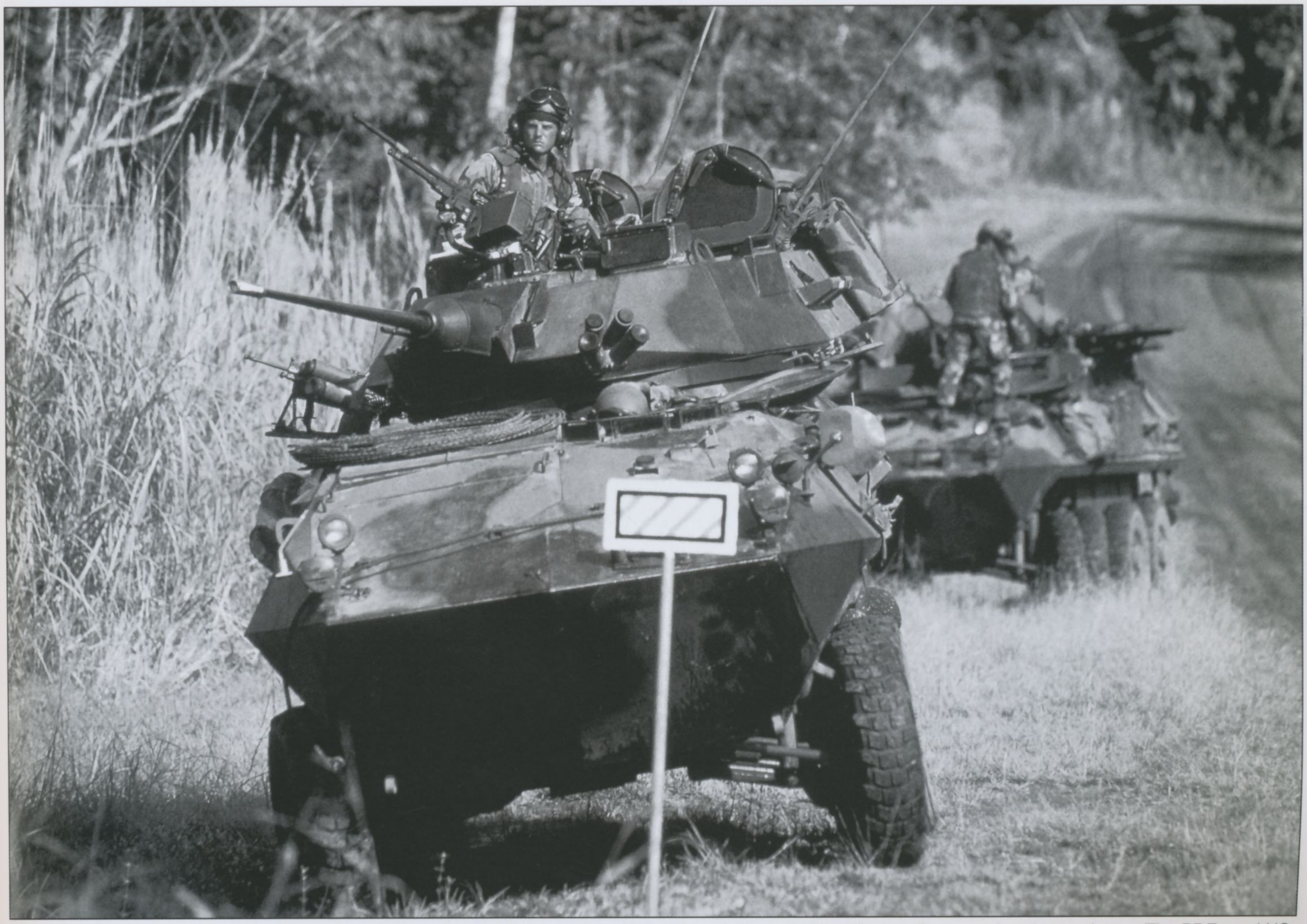
Besides the LAV-25s (shown here), LAC-C2, and LAV-Ls deployed to Panama there were other variants including the LAV-AT (antitank with two TOW antiarmor missile launchers), LAV-M (mortar with an 81mm M252 mortar), LAV-AD (air defense with a five-barrel rotary 25mm GAU-12/U Equalizer gun and two four-tube Stinger surface-to-air missile launchers), LAV-R (recovery), and LAV-MEWSS (mobile electronic warfare support system).



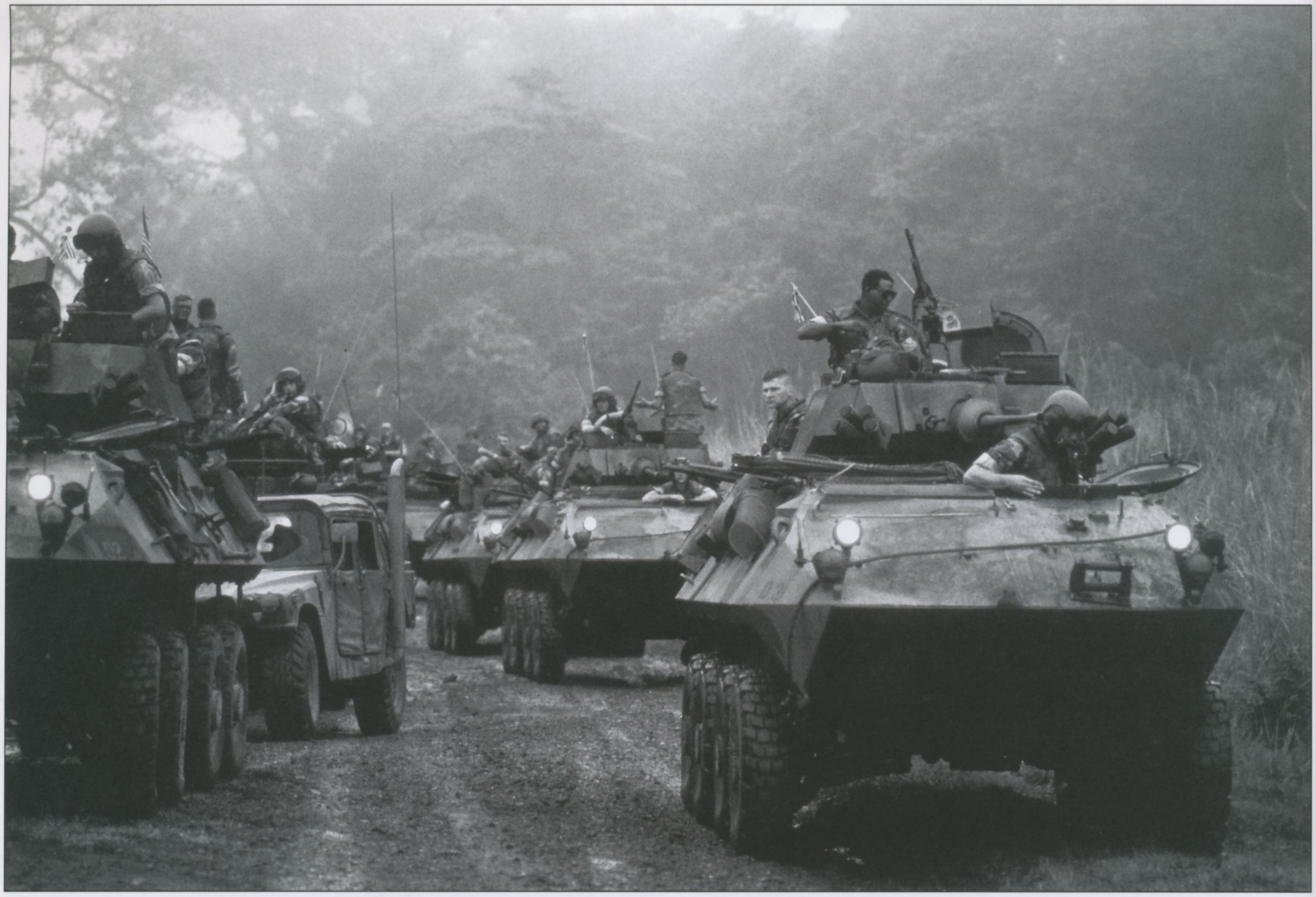
The LAV is amphibious, but only on river and lakes. It cannot be used for amphibious landings in surf. This is a LAV-C2 swimming in the Panama Canal.

LAVs were painted with earth (dark) brown and black splotches on a forest green base, the standard NATO camouflage pattern. Color shades varied between vehicles owning to them being repainted at different times, weathering, and the extent that different batches of paint were thinned. Even how the paint-sprayer was adjusted varied the difference in shade.

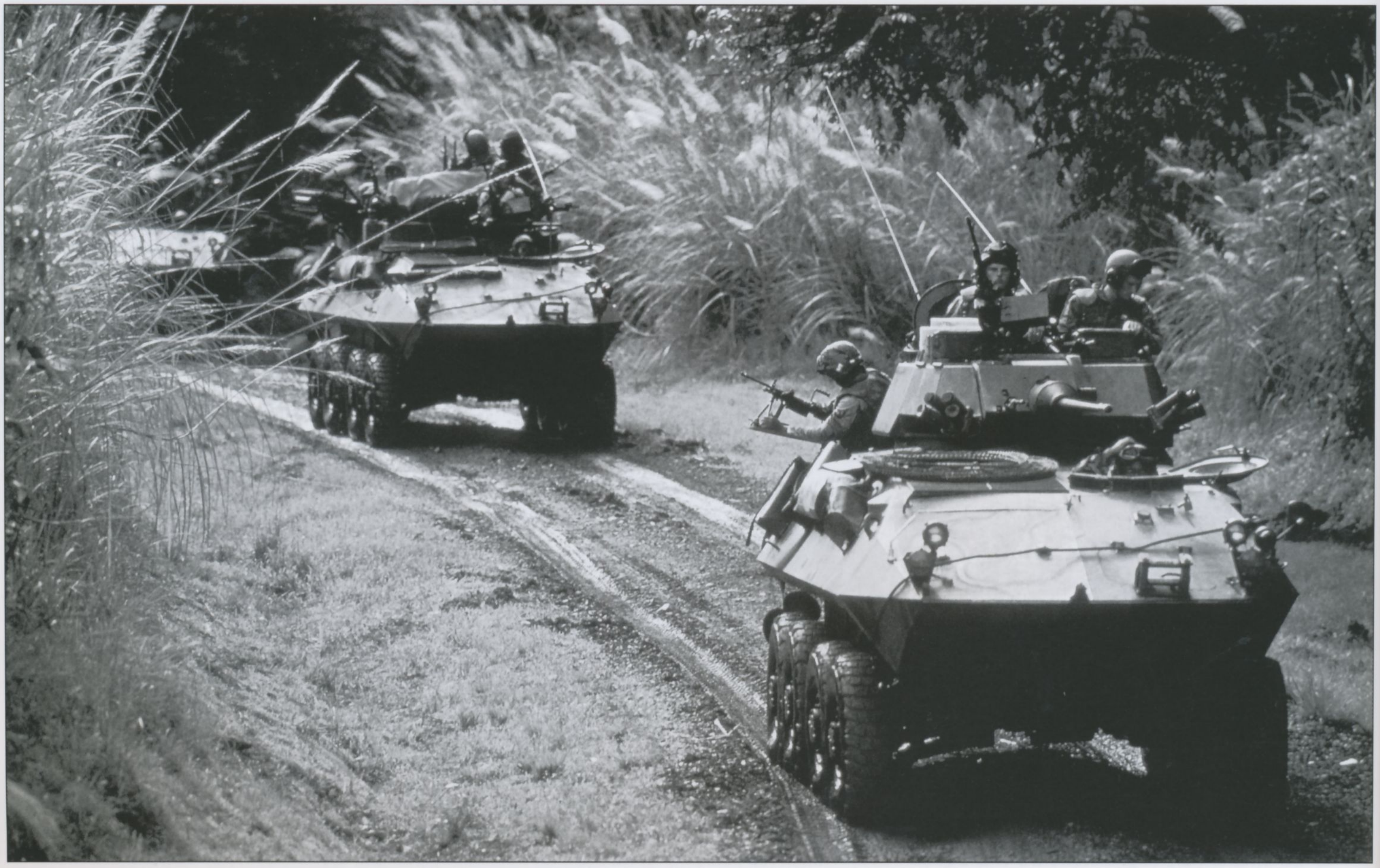


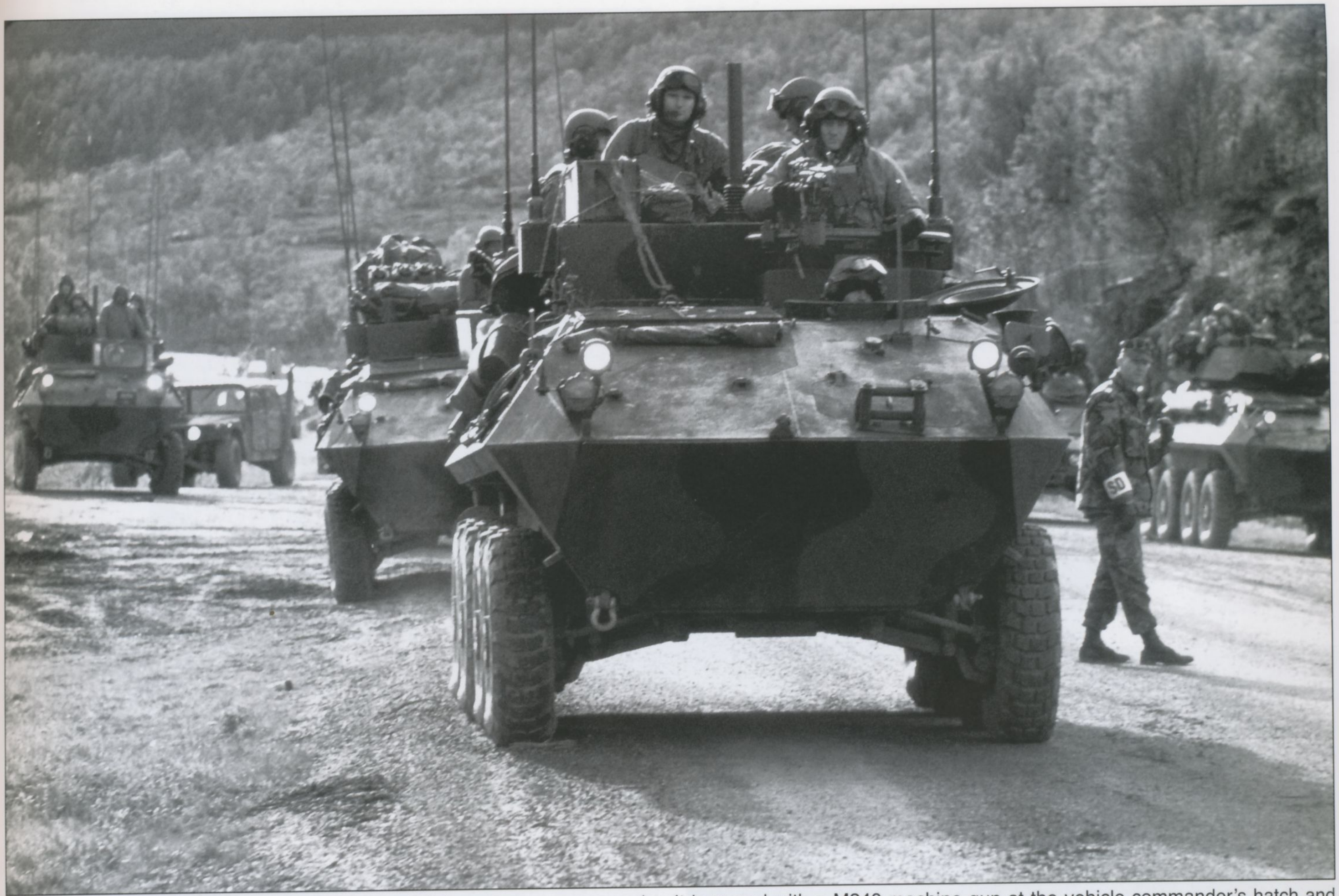


Orange ground-to-air recognition panels were placed atop LAVs to prevent them from being mis-identified as Panamanian armored cars. The PDF used US-made Cadillac-Gage four-wheel V-150 and six-wheel V-300 armored cars. Even with the differences in the number of wheels, the designs were similar enough to be difficult to identify from a fast moving aircraft, especially if the vehicles was among vegetation or dust or at night. The problem was compounded as both US and PDF armored vehicles had similar camouflage pattern and color schemes.

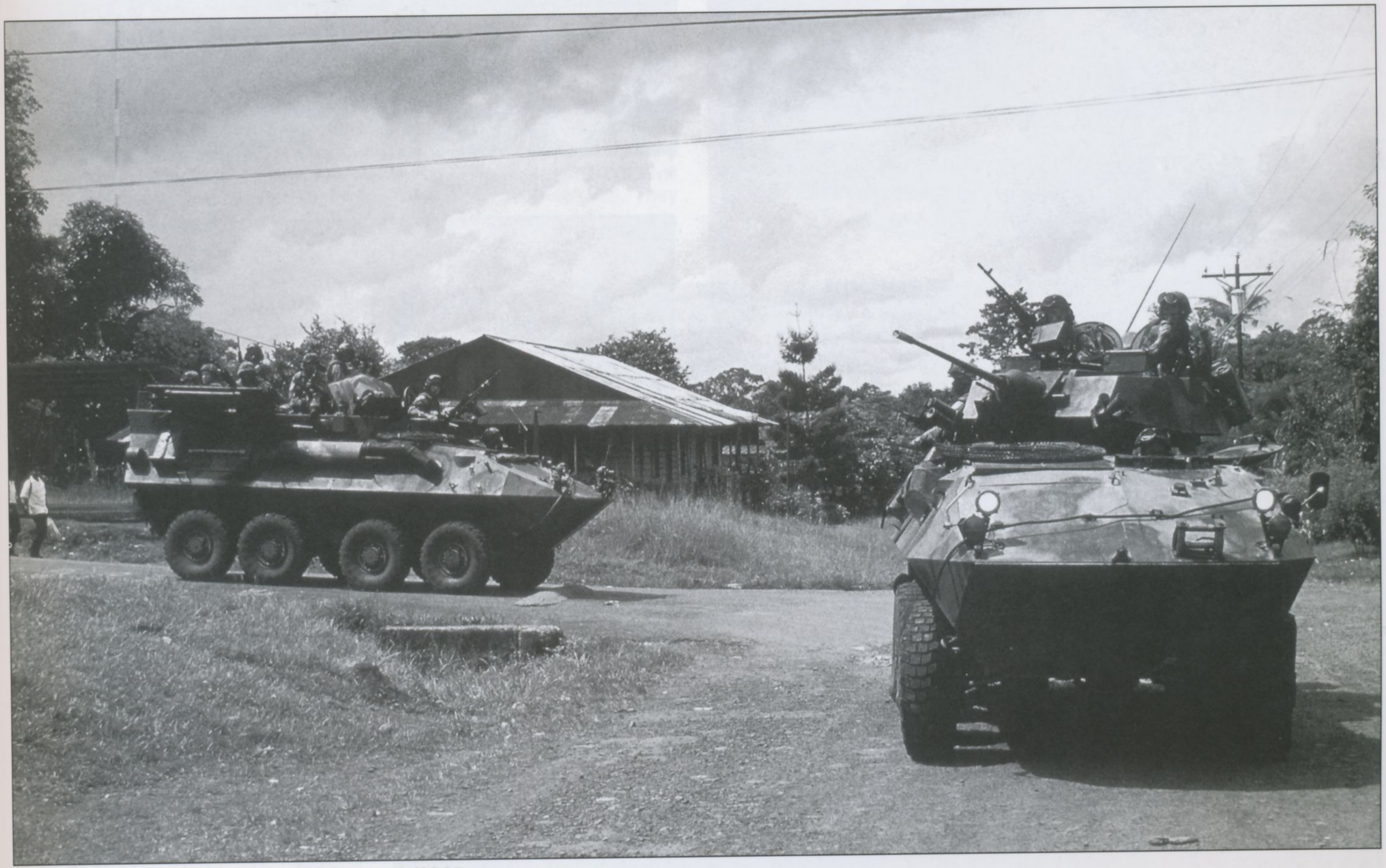


In an early morning fog a large patrol of LAVs prepare to move out.





The LAV-C2 command and control vehicle carried the company commander. It is armed with a M240 machine gun at the vehicle commander's hatch and mounts four radios allowing communications with the company's platoons, battalion headquarters, fire support, and logistics.

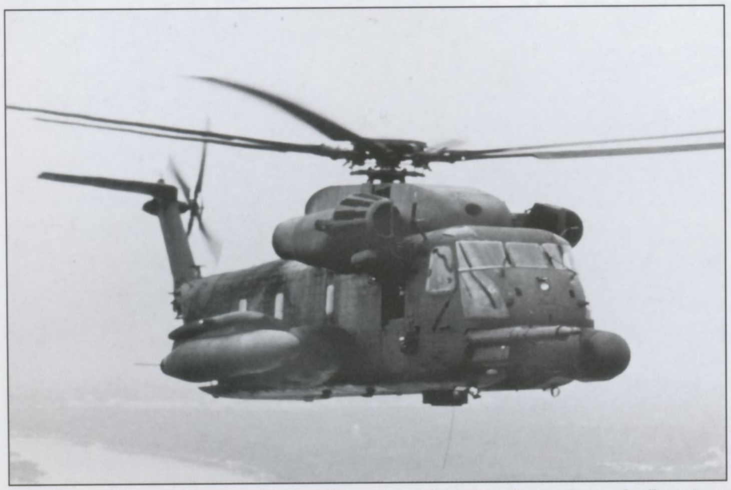


One of the company's two LAV-Ls follows a LAV-25.

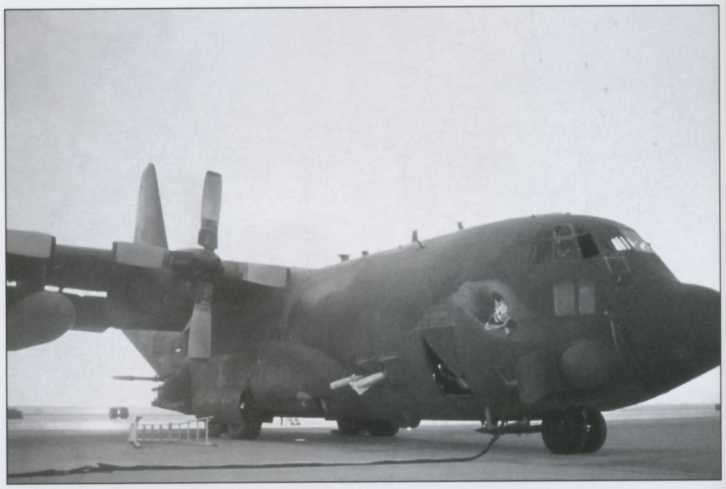
Special Operations Forces

Delta Force, officially the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment , primarily focused on the hunt for Noriega. Here a group of Delta Force troops off-load from Blackhawk helicopters in a rare photograph. Note that while they wear standard BDUs and web gear their hair is considerably longer than other US soldiers'. They normally operate in civilian clothes and the relaxed grooming standards they are permitted allowed them to blend in with civilians.

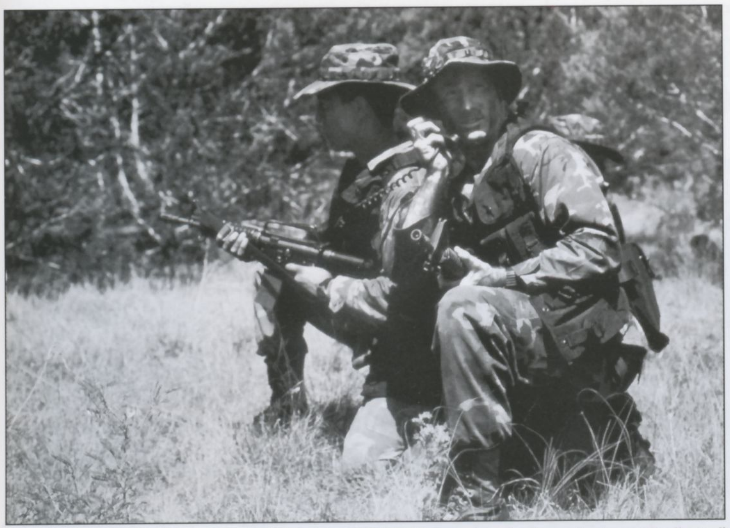
Significant Special Operations Forces (SOF) participated in JUST CAUSE conducting a wide variety of missions. The forces included Delta Force, Army Special Forces (Green Berets) and Rangers, Navy SEALs (Sea-Air-Land), and Air Force Special Operations. SOF elements kept a low profile during the operations and few photographs exist chronicling their activities. This photograph depicts Rangers of the 75th Ranger Regiment during a peacetime training exercise. All three of the regiment's battalions participated in JUST CAUSE.



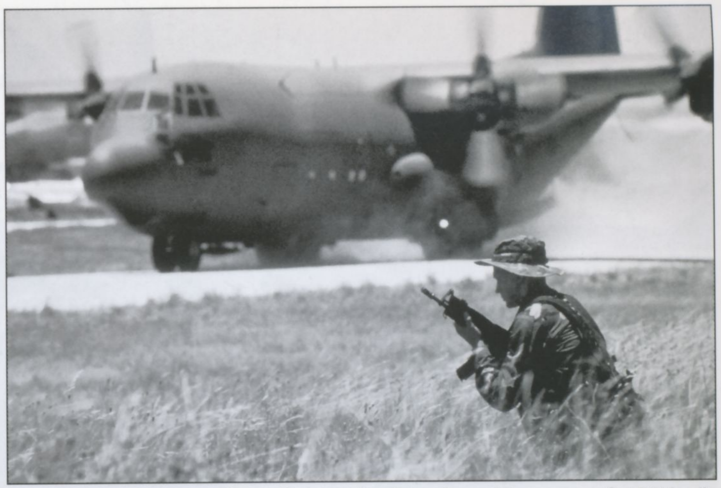
Air Force Special Operations Sikorsky MH-53J Pave Low helicopters supported JUST CAUSE along with the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne). The "M" prefix designates special operations mission aircraft.



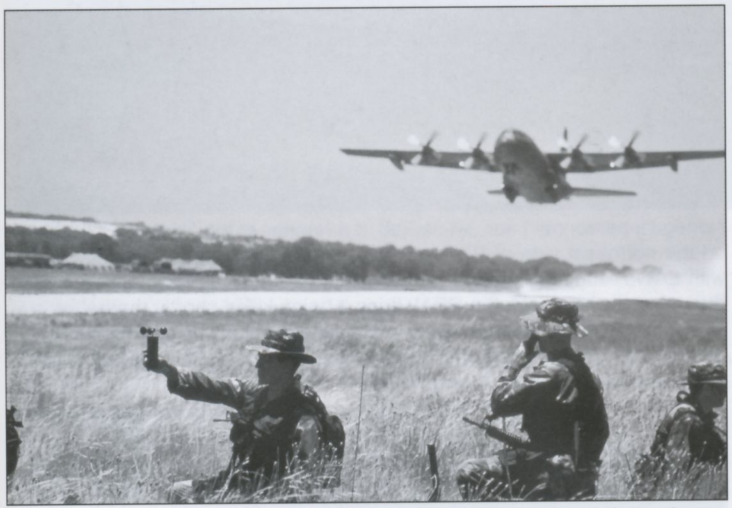
An extremely valuable SOF aircraft was the AC-130H Spectre. These aircraft provided precision fire support and were instrumental in destroying la Comandancía, other key facilities, and many of the PDF's armored vehicles and 14.5mm ZPU-4 antiaircraft guns. The AC-130H was armed with two 20mm M61 Vulcan six-barrel rotary cannons, a 40mm L/40 automatic gun, and a 105mm M102 modified howitzer all mounted on the port (left) side. The aircraft is fitted with various sensors and night vision systems allowing it to detect and precisely engage ground targets while orbiting in a counterclockwise turn.



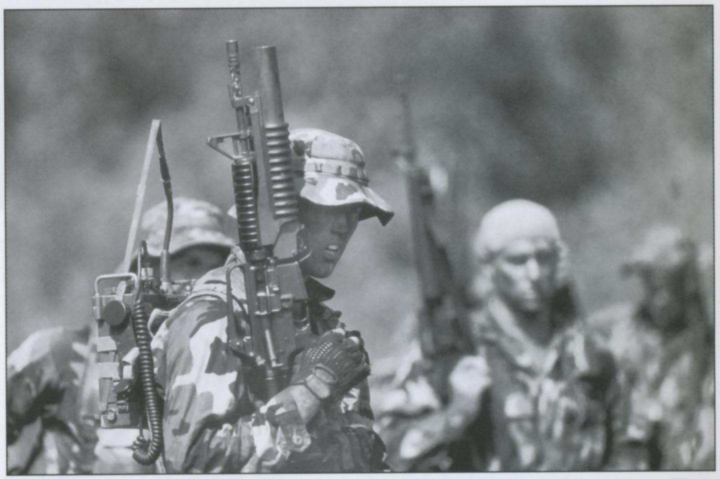
Air Force Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP), or simply "combat controllers," played a valuable role in JUST CAUSE. TACPs were attached the Army maneuver units to call for and direct Air Force close air support (CAS) fighter-bombers or Spectre. Combat controllers mainly used AN/PRC-113 VHF/UHF man-packed radios. They were allowed latitude in what web gear they used. Here police SWAT-type black web gear is being used.



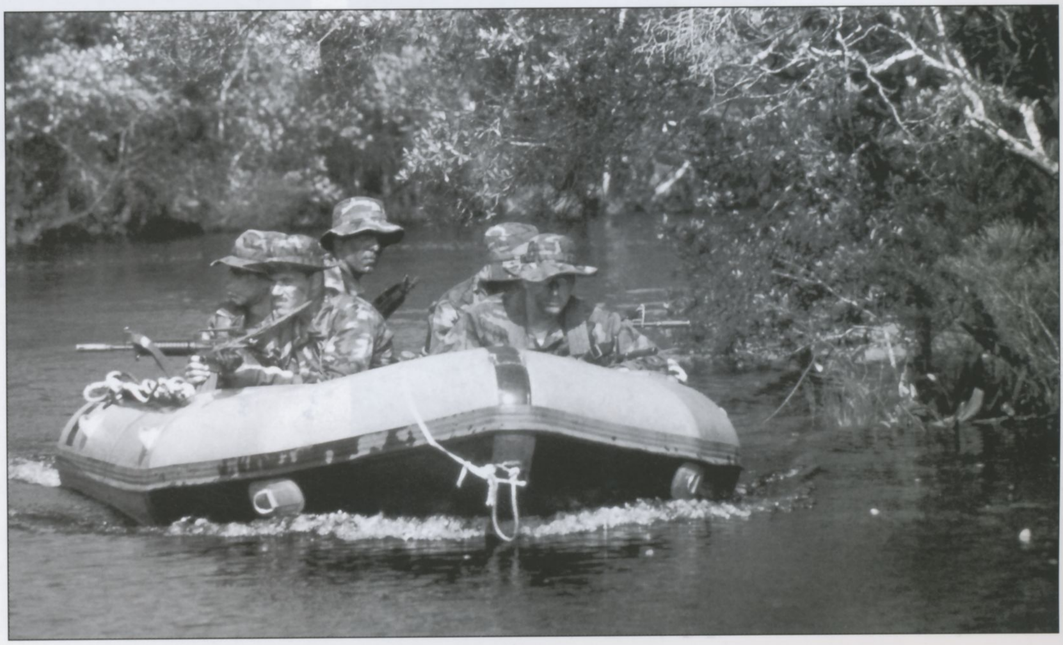
A TACP combat controller pulls security duty at an airbase as a C-130H rolls down the runway. Combat controllers were armed with 5.56mm GAU-5 carbines, a shortened version of the M16A2 rifle.



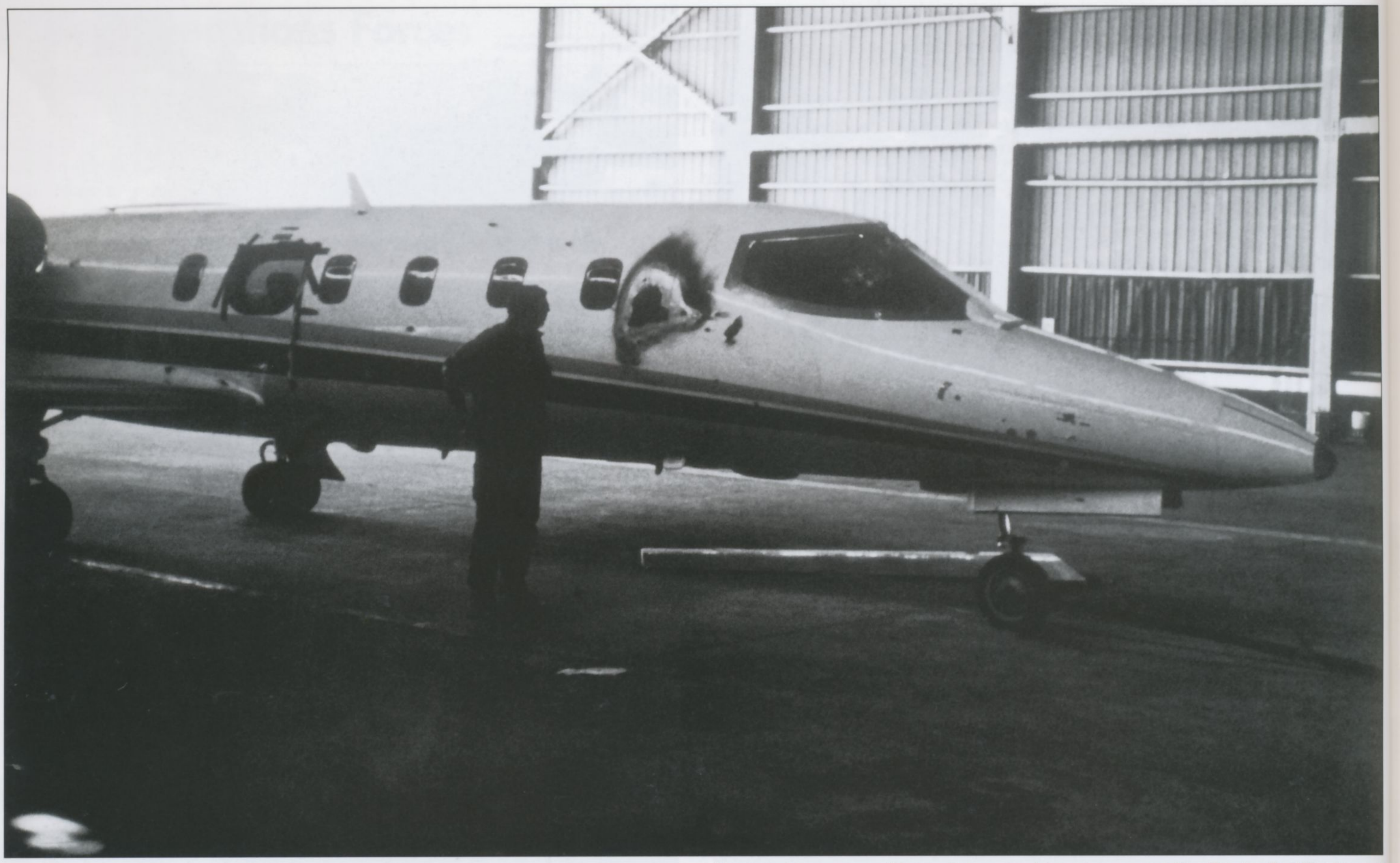
Combat controllers could collect and report local weather information, a valuable service as this was so important for effective use of CAS. They commonly wore "bonnie hats," but when operating in support of Army units they would wear Kevlar helmets.

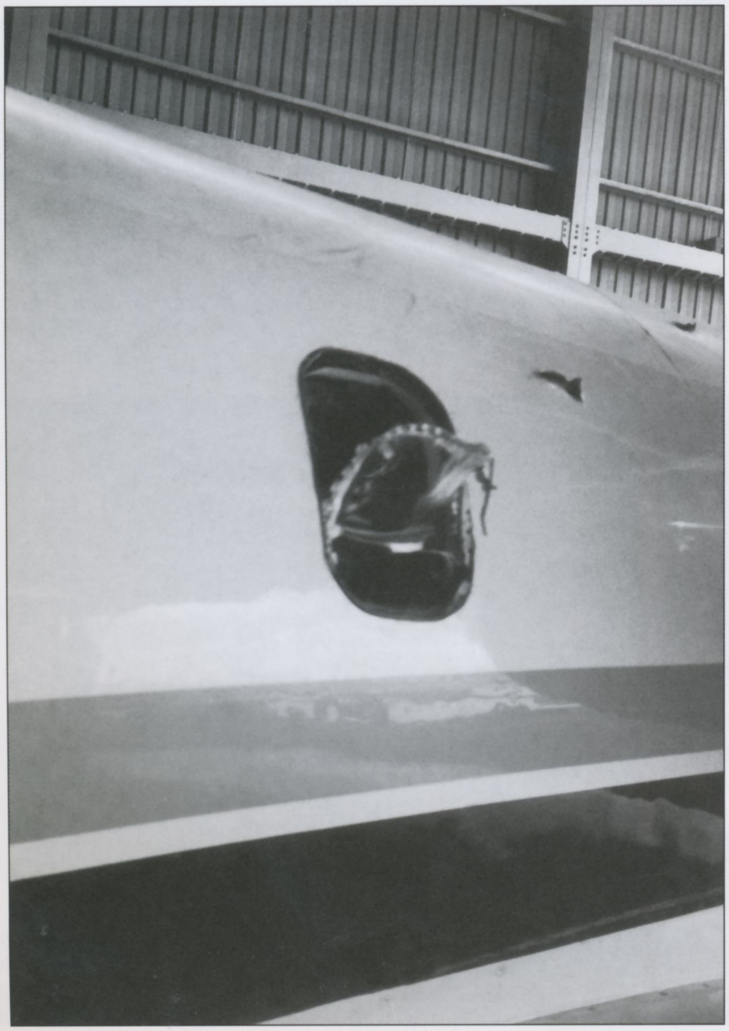


Navy SEALs, when not underwater, wore BDUs and varied headgear. They used 5.56mm M16A1 rifles and carbines, 40mm M203 grenade launchers mounted on both, West German 9mm MP5A3 submachine guns, and 7.62mm M60E3 light machine guns. The radio is an AN/PRC-119 SINCGARS.

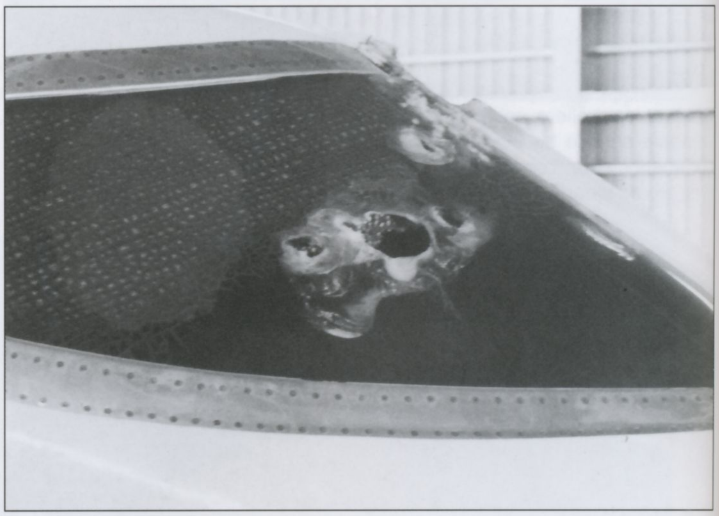


Zodiac inflatable and semi-rigid boats were used by all SOF elements. The SEAL teams executing the raid on Punta Paitilla Airport arrived by Zodiac.





Noriega's personnel Lear Jet parked in a hanger at the Punta Paitilla Airport on the northeast side of Panama City after being disabled by Navy SEALs with LAWs, 40mm grenades, and small arms fire. A LAW was fired straight through the windshield; the SEAL firing it being killed shortly thereafter in an ambush. US F-15 fighters were conducting combat air patrols on the air corridors to Cuba, Nicaragua, and Columbia in case Noriega managed to escape by air. (Robert F. Dorr photos)



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ISBN 962-361-633-3

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